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*Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS*

The Third Degree
*by ARTHUR SOMERS ROCHE*

The Midway Murder
*by OCTAVUS ROY COHEN*

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*by DAMON RUNYON*

The Green Man
*by G. K. CHESTERTON*

Trail of the Brown Sedan
*by MACKINLAY KANTOR*

**THE UNKIND PHILANTHROPIST**
***A NEW SAINT STORY by LESLIE CHARTERIS***

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION

A KING-SIZE PUBLICATION

THE saint DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

MAY, 1954
VOL. 2, NO. 1

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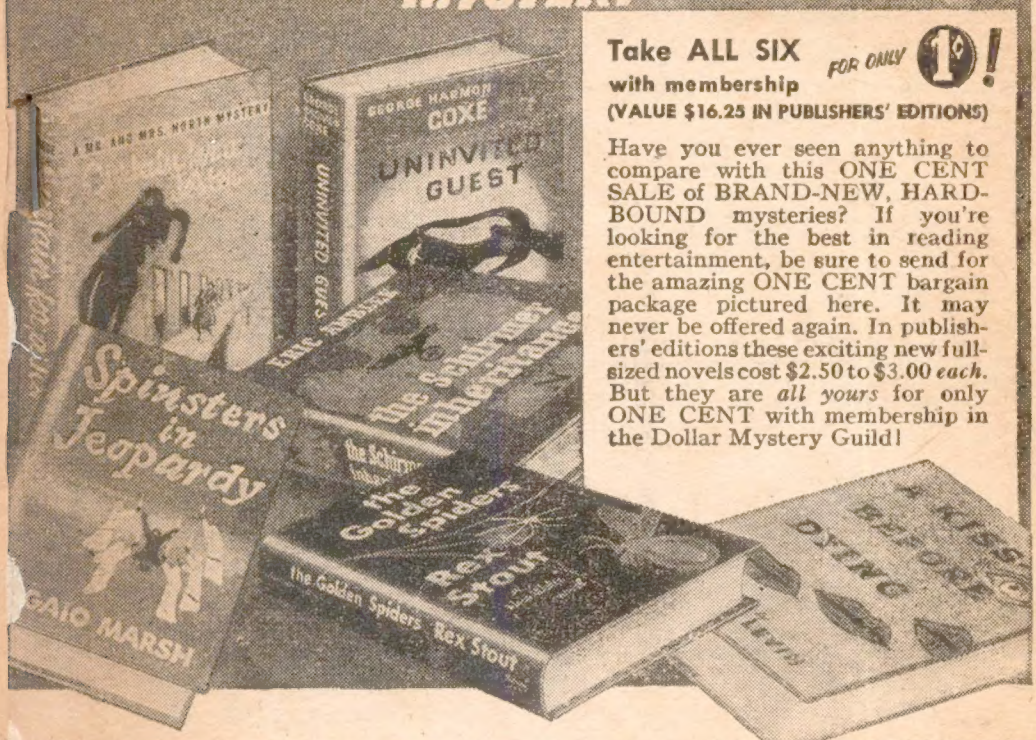


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# the unkind philanthropist

*by . . . Leslie Charteris*

**Our haloed sinner crosses paths with the world's meanest man—and metes out the subtle justice that is the genius of a saint.**

SIMON TEMPLAR said lazily, "One of these days when I decide to become Dictator of the Universe, I shall issue a law for the protection of men's names. This modern fad of giving them to girls has got to be stopped somewhere. It was bad enough when women broke out in a rash of semi-masculine diminutives, occasionally with and just as often without some connection with the monickers they got baptized with, of which I have known for instance Bobbie, Billie, Jo, Charlie, Marty, Jackie, Jerry, Freddie, Tommy, Dickie, Stevie, Teddy, Tony—"

"Braggart," said Tristan Brown.

"After which," Simon continued inexorably, "I have seen the movie marquees blossom with actresses calling themselves, with or without baptismal authority, by such traditionally male labels as Toby, Dale, Gene, Jeff, Robin, Gregg, Terry, Alexis, and heaven knows what next. In my own limited acquaintances of females, I can vouch for dolls who were actually christened Franklin, Craig, Cameron, Christopher, and even George."

"How about the men I've

*HAPPY, HAPPY READERS — HERE'S YOUR EBULLIENT SAINT AT HIS MOST WICKED AND IN TUMULTUOUS PUERTO RICO*

known," Tristan inquired, "who were called Jess, Evelyn, and Shirley?"

"I think a little research would show that they had the prior claim. Only they lost it sooner. Like that guy who keeps on writing about me. He's always getting circulars from mail-order lingerie merchants addressed to Miss Leslie Charteris. It's getting so that about the only name you could give your son today, with reasonable certainty that no woman would be wearing it tomorrow, would be something like Gladys."

"I think Tristan is a nice name," she said tartly. "So did my father. Brown is dull enough for a surname, so he tried to liven it up. I like it."

Simon squeezed the car past a crawling truck top-heavy with sugar cane.

"I'm the old-fashioned type," he said gloomily. "I think girls should have girls' names. If you ever suffered through the opera you'd remember that Tristan was a man."

"What does the name of Morgan make you think of?" she asked.

"J. P. Morgan. A big business man. Or before him, Sir Henry Morgan, another very male go-getter, in his way."

"But in the same legend that Tristan came from, wasn't Morgan le Fay a woman?"

Just for a moment Simon was stopped.

"Well, as I recall it, she was the queen of the fairies," he said, and the girl had to laugh.

It was merely an idle conversation to lighten the drive from San Juan up into the mountains of Puerto Rico, and the Saint had no idea at the time of the significance that the thought behind it would have in his always unpredictable odyssey.

Tristan Brown had entered his life during his first morning on the island, on a tour of the historic fortress of El Morro, which dominates the narrow entrance of the spacious harbor which Christopher Columbus discovered, and whence later Ponce de Leon, then governor of the colony, sailed on his famous quest for the Fountain of Youth which took him only to Florida and his death. And because she was very noticeably feminine—in spite of the name which he had not, at that point, known—with urchin-cut mahogany hair, eager brown eyes and a figure that molded exactly the right curves into a thin cotton dress, and in fact would have been an exciting person to see even in a much less nondescript crowd, Simon automatically maneuvered himself next to her as the party moved along and thoughtfully contrived to stay there.

The guide was explaining with the aid of a map how Puerto

Rico's strategic position had once made it the natural rendezvous for the Spanish treasure convoys that fanned out on their golden quests all up and down the coasts of Central and South America. And how, for the same reason, it was coveted by the privateers who cruised the Caribbean to loot the looters on their homeward voyage. And as the guide talked Tristan Brown looked at the Saint and could not help thinking how much like the idealized conception of a pirate he looked, with the trade wind ruffling his dark hair and the sun on his keen tanned face and a half-smile on his strong reckless mouth.

Against those battlements the tall swordman's grace of his body and the merry insolence of his blue eyes seemed to span the centuries as easily as the weathered stone, so that with the slightest imagined change of costume she could see him as the living prototype of what the heroes of innumerable technicolor movies tried ineffectually to re-create; but with him she had a strange disturbing feeling that the resemblance was real . . . And she awoke to the awareness that she was still staring at him, and that he knew it.

Farther along someone asked: "Was this fort ever captured?"

"Not until the Spanish-American war," said the conductor, with some pride. "And then it was mostly by invitation. The English and the Dutch tried to take it for a couple of hundred years, but they weren't good enough. In 1595 they even gave the great Sir Francis Drake a licking."

"And I bet you won't find that in an English history book," Simon murmured to the girl.

By that time she had recovered from her confusion.

"Who was it said that histories are always written by the winning side?" she responded easily.

"I don't know, but it's probably true. Drake must have been pretty young then, and he did get his own back on the Armada. But he'd be a still bigger man if they didn't try to make him look like a winner all the time."

When the tour was over and she asked directions back from the castle it was easy to offer his personal guiding service, and he walked her by way of the Fortaleza up into the narrow streets of the old town. Then it was time for lunch and the restaurant El Mesón was conveniently near by.

Over glasses of Dry Sack they exchanged names, and she recognized his at once.

"I just knew it would have to be something like that when I first saw you," she said, but she declined to explain what she meant.

"To answer the routine question you're dying to ask," he said, "I'm not in the midst of any felonious business. I'm just island-hopping and amusing myself as I go along."

"Spending your ill-gotten gains?"

"Maybe."

"And I'm spending somebody else's," she said brightly.

"Does he know about it?"

"Oh, no. He's dead." She laughed at the restrained lift of his brows, and added, "Have you heard of the Ogden H. Kiel Foundation?"

"Of course."

For the benefit of any unlikely person who may not have heard of it, it may be recalled that Mr. Ogden H. Kiel was a shining example of free enterprise who, starting away back with a bottle of snake oil and a medicine show, parlayed himself into a patent medicine empire that loaded the drug store shelves of the nation with an assortment of salves, lotions, potions, physics, and vitamin compounds which, if all their various claims could be believed, should have banished every human ailment from the face of this planet.

The fact that this millenium did not supervene must have spurred him to continually more frenzied efforts of distribution, through the media of printed advertising, radio, and television, so that the sale of his nostrums brought him a flood of wealth which not even modern taxes could reduce to a stream of a size that even a lavish liver could spend.

Wherefore he had created the Ogden H. Kiel Foundation, dedicated (to do him justice) to giving suffering humanity more substantial forms of relief than gaily colored pills. It was an institution which, upon probate of his will, found itself with more than eighty million dollars in the kitty and at least another million in royalties accruing every year.

"I work for it," Tristan Brown said. "For a mere hundred dollars a week, plus my expenses, I help to give away millions."

"How does one get a job like that?" Simon inquired with interest.

"I happen to be a lawyer. Don't look indignant—it's quite legal! The firm of which I'm a very junior member happens to be the trustees of the fund. It takes six of us all our time to get around and find places to leave checks. It isn't half the life you'd think it would be, but I'm seeing a lot of the world."

"And you're here to hand out some of this dough in Puerto Rico?"

"It's the kind of territory that the Foundation is set up to help, and I'm supposed to find the best channel for one of our grants."

"How about me? A million dollars would rehabilitate me right out of sight."

"That's what I'd be afraid of," she said dryly.

He sighed. "It's prejudices like that," he said, "that have forced me into my life of crime."

He introduced her to *empana-*

*das,* succulent pasties filled with a mixture of ground meat, almonds, raisins, olives, and capers, and *mofongo,* a fried mash of green plantains mixed with cracklings, garlic, coriander, and cayenne. And she made him talk more about himself. She made it easy for him to do, revealing a most unlawyerlike delight in the motives and methods which had made the Saint almost as mythological a figure as the Robin Hood with whom he was always inevitably compared. And since there was nothing mythical at all about his reaction to any beautiful girl, it must be admitted that he thoroughly enjoyed the realization that her response to him as a person was much warmer than the basic requirements of intellectual research.

But the Saint was also an extraordinarily careful man in some ways, and a pretty girl who claimed to be a qualified attorney and was, moreover, entrusted with such a fantastic responsibility as Tristan Brown, was a sufficiently unusual phenomenon to draw a delicate screen of caution between his intelligence and his impulses.

Everything she said might be perfectly true. But just as possibly, everything she said might be only the groundwork for some bunko routine that would presently begin to take a familiar shape.

The Saint was no stranger to the technique of the Colossal Lie. He had used it himself on occasion. If you say you are the sheriff of some unheard-of county in Texas, almost any reasonably suspicious citizen will check up on you. But if you say you are a Governor of the Bank of England, and pick up a telephone and invite anyone to call London and verify it, the average sucker will figure that nobody would dare to tell such a preposterous tale if his bluff could be called so easily, and will not even bother to put it to the test.

Simon permitted himself to keep a pleasantly open mind about Tristan Brown. But he also permitted himself to lead her into telling him that she had graduated from Columbia Law School, and as soon as he was back at his hotel he looked up the address of the Ogden H. Kiel Foundation in a New York directory; and that same afternoon he sent off two telegrams.

While he waited for the replies, however, there was nothing to stop him getting the maximum pleasure out of their acquaintance. He took her to dinner at the Casino, danced and played harmless roulette with her at Jack's, and was making more plans for the next day as he strolled back with her to their hotel.

"I have to work tomorrow," she said firmly. "I'm visiting the Guavate prison camp. They're

sending a car for busy little me."

"Tell 'em you'll get there on your own," he said. "Let me rent a car and drive you up. I'll wait for you and we can come back by way of El Yunque, which you ought to see."

That was how he came to be driving her up the narrow winding road out of Caguas, making trivial banter about male and female names.

They turned into the Guavate National Forest and went on twisting upwards, glimpsing simple vacation cabins and rocky streams tumbling between the trees, and then out of the deepest shade and still winding upwards along steep slopes green with banana trees and opening on to vast blue-veiled panoramas of the lower hills, and so at last to a wide open gateway across the road where a guard was negligently taking a light for his cigarette from one of a group of convicts.

Beyond, there were plain, clean-looking buildings without bars or wire, and many more brown-skinned men in prison denims who worked or loafed and turned to stare at them with uninhibited and amiable curiosity.

"Don't apologize for not asking me in," said the Saint. "Something about me is allergic to prisons, even when they have a lovely setting like this. I'll have lunch in Caguas and come back for you about three."

And that was how he happened to meet Mr. Elmer Quire.

## II

Mr. Quire was a stout man with a ruddy face and a shock of white hair, a thin beak of a nose, and bright eyes that twinkled behind heavy black spectacle frames, so that he looked rather like an elderly and benevolent owl. He had a slight tic which kept his head nodding almost imperceptibly, a movement which in combination with his bluff paternal manner made him seem ingratiatingly sympathetic and cooperative to anyone who was talking to him. It was an affliction that had proved to be anything but a disadvantage to him in his operations.

He was ready to tell anyone who asked him that he was a retired building contractor from New England, which for all it matters to this chronicle he may quite well have been. He had come to Puerto Rico ten years before in search of a pleasant climate in which to take his well-earned ease, and had stayed ever since, which made him a relative old-timer in the current new era of the island's development.

He had taken steps to make himself widely acquainted, had taken active part in many charitable enterprises, and was generally reputed to be a pillar of the community, a natural choice for

civic committees, and a philanthropist of stature. Exactly how much wealth he had retired with was a matter of conjecture. But it was even less common knowledge that he had been able to increase his assets considerably while he appeared to be devoting all his time to good works.

It was the fine hand of Fate that caused the Saint to be privileged to learn how this was done on his very first encounter with Mr. Elmer Quire.

Mr. Quire never dreamed that Fate was stalking him when he saw Simon Templar saunter through the Mallorquina in Caguas, where he was having lunch, and sit down at the next table. He gave the Saint a little more than a casual glance, as people usually did, dismissed him for the moment as an obvious tourist and returned his attention to the man who sat nervously stirring a cup of coffee beside him.

"That's the trouble with you people," Mr. Quire said severely. "One tries to help you, to bring you along and teach you to grow up. Everyone knows how hard I've worked for all of you. But you're like so many of the others, Gamma. I gave you a great opportunity and you messed it up."

"I did my best, *señor,*" said the man called Gamma.

He was obviously a native *borinqueño* of the country, a thin middle-aged man with a lined face and anxious black eyes, and his dark clothes were neat but old and threadbare.

"Of course you say that," Mr. Quire lectured him reproachfully. "A failure always says he did his best. Therefore the failure is not his fault. He won't admit that he failed because his best wasn't good enough, which would force him to try harder. That is why he never becomes a success."

"Is it my fault, *señor*, if my tomato seeds shoot up only a little bit and then die?"

"Certainly it is. They died because you didn't put chemicals in the water, as I've been trying to explain."

"When you tell me about this wonderful way to grow tomatoes in water, without earth, you do not tell me I must put anything in the water."

Mr. Quire became aware intuitively that he had an additional audience in the person of the bronzed tourist with the buccaneer's face who sat almost at his elbow, but the knowledge made him, if possible, only more righteous and long-suffering.

"If I told you once I must have told you twenty times, Gamma. How would you expect any plant to grow on nothing but water? You're enough of a farmer to know better than that. It has to have something to feed on. Like the fertilizer you put on the ground. The whole principle of growing vegetables hydroponically is that you put the fertilizer

directly into the tanks of water that your plants grow in."

"You did not tell me, *señor,*" Gamma said doggedly.

"I told you, but you must have forgotten. Or you just weren't paying attention. That's what I mean about how hard it is to do anything for you people. You don't concentrate. You half learn something, go off half cocked, and then wonder why it doesn't work."

The man sipped his coffee and stirred it again glumly. Mr. Quire continued to eat. There was a long silence which Mr. Quire quite imperturbably allowed to run its course.

"If I put in chemical now and new seed," Gamma said at last, "will the tomatoes grow?"

"Certainly."

"Then I must do that."

"Exactly."

"But," Gamma said, "I have no money to buy the chemicals."

Mr. Quire seemed surprised.

"None at all?"

"*Señor,* you know that the little I had, and all that you lent me, was spent to build the tanks in which the tomatoes would grow. And from my friends I already borrow all that I can to live."

"Then how will you go about it?" asked Mr. Quire, with fatherly interest.

The man licked his lips. "I thought, *señor,* perhaps, if you would lend me a little more . . ."

Mr. Quire's frown was almost a benediction.

"My dear man, that's quite impossible! I lent you everything I could spare to help you start this hydroponic business."

"But I will pay you as soon as the tomatoes grow—"

"But it'll be weeks, even months, before they're ready for market. Think of all the time you've wasted on that first crop that died. You should have been getting money from them already to meet your first payment to me, which is overdue right now. I'm not a rich man, Gamma. I need that money back. In fact, I must have it at once."

"I cannot pay you now, *señor.*"

Mr. Quire pursed his lips worriedly.

"That's really too bad," he said. "It means I shall have to take your land."

"You cannot do that!"

"Tut, tut, man. Of course I can. Or are you forgetting again? When you borrowed my money you signed a paper giving me the right to take your land in full settlement if you were ever behind in your payments. You're behind now, and I have to get my money back somehow."

"If you do that, how shall I live?"

"You'll get a job," Mr. Quire said heartily, "like anyone else. All these new factories are crying for workers, and they train you free. I'll be glad to give you a recommendation."

"But my wife, *señor*—"

"Probably I can get her a job too," Mr. Quire said magnanimously. "Between you, you might easily earn more than you ever could from growing tomatoes."

"She will have a new baby very soon," Gamma said in a dull voice. "And already there are four to take care of . . ."

Mr. Quire put a last large piece of pork chop into his mouth and mopped his plate with a piece of bread.

"Really," he said, "sometimes I don't think I'll ever understand you people. I suppose most of you are Catholics and the rest are just irresponsible. Anyway, you breed like rabbits and then you expect special consideration because you've got too many children to support. I'm truly sorry for you, but it isn't my fault that you've got a bigger family than you can afford. You should have thought about that before you had them. Why, if I gave money away to everyone on this island who just happens to be poor, I'd be a pauper myself before dinner."

Gamma sat with his shoulders hunched, staring haggardly at the table.

Presently he said, with a sort of frightened hesitancy: "You spoke of the new factories, *señor.* My land is on the main road they are building over to Ponce. Perhaps some company would like to buy it. We could sell it for a good price, and I would pay you back and have something to start over again."

"I'll certainly have to try and sell it to somebody," said Mr. Quire. "But it isn't your land any more. It's mine, to do what I like with—or will be as soon as I record that paper you signed."

Gamma raised his eyes slowly and they glowed with a dark pain and understanding that made them hot pools in his tense tortured face.

*"Señor,"* he said, "they speak of you as a good man, but now I think you are a devil!"

Mr. Elmer Quire sat quite still, but a deep flush crept out of his collar and climbed up into the roots of his hair, mantling his rosy complexion with rich purple as it rose. His bright eyes were no longer twinkling, but became glassy and seemed to protrude. His head still kept up its slight monotonous nodding, but now the movement seemed to acquire a sinister and deliberate emphasis.

At last his voice came, a hoarse choking splutter of incredibly low-pitched violence.

"How dare you. How dare you speak to me like that. You ungrateful wretch. After all I've done for you. You made a straightforward business deal, and now because you can't keep your end of the bargain you justify yourself by insulting me. Next thing, you'll be going to some damned shyster lawyer and trying to wriggle out of the whole

thing. Well, let me tell you something—that paper you signed is legal, and I'll defend it all the way to the Supreme Court if I have to, if it costs me ten thousand dollars.

"And let me tell you something else. You go around talking like that and I'll have you put in jail. There's a law to stop you saying things like that about me, and you'd better find out about it damn quick. And if I ever hear that you've repeated a lie like that I'll not only have the police after you, I'll see that you never get any kind of job as long as you live—or your wife, or your unwashed brats either!" The strangling voice paused and gathered itself for one last burst. "Now get out of my sight before I lose my temper!"

Gamma got to his feet, pale and shaken, but he managed to start to speak. "It is not right, *señor—*"

*"Get out!"* said Mr. Quire in a whisper of such concentrated viciousness that the man turned and stumbled hurriedly away in an almost superstitious panic.

Mr. Quire wiped his brow with a snowy handkerchief.

The congestion subsided slowly from his face and he began to unwrap a cigar.

In spite of the intensity of the paroxysm his rage had been so muted that in the general chatter and clatter of the restaurant not a word might have been audible at a distance of more than six feet. But he remembered that the tourist with the pirate's profile at the next table was within that range, and turned to find a disconcertingly cool gaze resting steadily on him.

"Well, bless my soul," said Mr. Quire with disarming joviality. "I do believe I was getting quite steamed up."

"I thought you were going to have a stroke," said the Saint mildly, and refrained from adding that he had hoped to see it.

Mr. Quire lighted his cigar.

"Some of these people would try the patience of a saint," he remarked smugly. "You must have heard some of the conversation, so you may have gotten a rough idea. They're like overgrown children—full of quick enthusiasms without the stamina to carry them through, hopelessly inefficient on details, and sulky when they upset their own applecarts."

"Who was your problem child?"

"Pedro Gamma. A nice fellow but a hopeless bungler. I'm afraid I'll have to write him off as one of my failures."

"It seemed to me," Simon said with no expression, "that he might have been entitled to another chance."

"You don't know how many chances I've given him already," Mr. Quire said heavily. "It's the only hobby I've got, trying to help these people. You've got to ex-

pect some disappointments. And you have to know when to take a firm line, even though it's heartbreaking sometimes." Mr. Quire dismissed the subject with a final shrug of noble resignation. "You're a visitor here, I take it?" he asked.

Simon nodded. "Sort of."

"Not in any kind of business?"

"I might get into some," said the Saint thoughtfully. The notion had only occurred to him in the last few minutes.

Mr. Quire took out his wallet, extracted a card and passed it over.

"If I can be of any help to you, give me a call. I've been here for ten years, so I know my way around pretty well. And I'm really interested in anything that's good for the island." He stood up. "Please feel free to take me up on that, any time."

Simon read the name and address and put the card away carefully as he looked up to see Mr. Quire chatting genially with the proprietor at the door as he paid his bill. It was obvious that he was a well known and favored customer. There was a parting gust of cordial amenities as he went out, and through the window Simon watched him climb into a large black Cadillac and drive away.

The Saint finished his own meal presently, and also went to the front counter with his bill.

"Do you know Mr. Quire well?" he asked, in conversational Spanish.

"*Si, señor. Muy bien.*"

"What sort of man is he?"

"A very respected man, *señor.* He does much good for Puerto Rico."

"He rather likes to have things his own way, doesn't he?"

The proprietor raised his shoulders discreetly.

"If he likes someone he will do anything in the world for him. But I should not like to cross him. He has a strong character."

"That is one way to describe him," said the Saint.

## III

"It's a really interesting prison," said Tristan Brown as he drove her away. "The men almost seem happy to be there. There's practically nothing to stop them escaping, as you saw; but when they do they usually come back by themselves in a few days, and explain that they had to go to a funeral, or attend to some business, or maybe just needed a night out."

"It's probably more comfortable than home to a lot of them," said the Saint. "And most of 'em wouldn't be habitual criminals. Just nice normal guys who gave way to a natural impulse to stick a knife in somebody who got out of line."

"The warden is doing quite a job of making them over, any-

way. He's a rare type—a natural philanthropist."

Simon glanced at her. "Could he qualify for an Ogden H. Kiel endowment?"

"He might. You see, we don't just write checks to organized charities, yet we obviously can't deal with thousands of individual cases. So in each area we go into, we try to find a good local administrator, give him an allocation, and leave the handling of it to his judgment."

"Doesn't that get you besieged by all kinds of phonies who think what a good thing they could make for themselves out of it?"

"It would if they knew what I was doing. But you haven't read any publicity about my visit, have you? Because I haven't told anyone except you. For the other people I meet I'm just a gadabout social worker nosing around."

"And I still couldn't qualify?"

It was the perfect cue for her to begin to hint that perhaps he might qualify after all if, for instance, he could produce a large amount of cash as evidence of his solvency and bona fides. If that was how the routine was to go. But she shook her head.

"I'm sorry. Now please stop making me think you're only interested in me because of Mr. Kiel's money, and tell me what you've been up to today."

"I've been studying another type who won't qualify—even more definitely."

He gave her a detailed account of his inadvertent eavesdropping on Mr. Elmer Quire, and was grateful that she quickly grasped its implications, for the subtlety of Mr. Quire was not easy to convey at second hand.

"The restaurant proprietor scored it right in the bullseye, whether he knew it or not," he said at the conclusion. " 'He'll do anything in the world for you if he likes you, but don't cross him.' It sounds fine, doesn't it? A stalwart salty character. But think about it a bit longer and you find it's the perfect description of the worst kind of spoiled selfish brat. Sweet as pie if he gets his own way, and a son of a witch if he doesn't.

"The only difference is that Quire is older in years and has some power and dough to back it up. The 'little tin god' cliché was coined for him. He's an arrogant, willful, egotistical chiseler masquerading as a big-hearted Lord Bountiful, a hypocrite so hungry for flattery and so terrified of the truth that any criticism turns him literally blue with rage. I saw it happen. Take it from me, Tristan—when you hear a man spoken about like that, look out. You're getting the low-down on a bastard."

"If you go on like that you're going to turn blue yourself," she said, and he suddenly grinned in apology.

They drove up through the

dense tropical rain-jungle, stopped to pick and taste wild strawberries that were brilliantly red and totally flavorless, and went on to the lodge near the summit, where they sat and drank beer on a terrace that looked out over a whole quadrant of the island. It was one of those rare clear days on El Yunque, which is usually wreathed with dripping clouds. Towards the north they could see all the way to the coast and the deep blue of the ocean beyond.

And when the daylight was fading and a chill came in the air, they drove down again and stopped for cocktails at a place where orchids grew in the open, and stayed to eat dinner with the city lights spread out far below them. It made a day to remember.

But as they drove down again into the soft warmth of Santurce she was a little sleepy and they did not talk much, so he thought again about Elmer Quire, and she knew it telepathically.

She said, "Are you going to do something about that man?"

"I might, one of these days," he said. "When I can't have this much fun with you."

"Then opportunity is just around the corner," she said. "I'm starting off early tomorrow to go around the island, to Mayagüez and Ponce. I'm still a working girl. I'll be gone for a couple of days."

"What's wrong with my car?"

"A local judge and his wife are taking me. And I can't get out of that because he's a former classmate of one of my bosses. Besides, I have to maintain some reputation."

"The first reason was good enough. You didn't have to add such a dull one."

She snuggled a little closer.

"In case you think I'm a prude," she said, "I was planning to invite you to my room for a nightcap anyway."

When he came down to breakfast the next morning she had already left. And there were two cablegrams in his box.

The first one he opened verified that Tristan Brown was indeed a graduate of Columbia Law School. The second said:

GLAD CONFIRM TRISTAN BROWN OUR FULLY ACCREDITED REPRESENTATIVE WILL APPRECIATE YOUR COOPERATION

JAMES TANTRUM

OGDEN H. KIEL FOUNDATION

So the improbable story was true, after all, as improbable stories occasionally could be. It made him feel even better.

But it still left him with time on his hands and nothing but the matter of Mr. Elmer Quire on his mind—which, for the Saint, was a highly unstable state to be in.

Mr. Quire was in the small office he maintained in San Juan, in conference with a vice-president of an Alabama textile mill, when the phone call came.

"I couldn't think of a better location for your factory," he was saying. "It's right outside Caguas, on the new four-lane highway to Ponce. Electricity, water, fine transportation, and plenty of labor to draw on. Used to be a hydroponic tomato farm, but it's nice level ground and naturally worth a lot more as an industrial site. They're good hardworking people around there, educated enough to learn fast, and yet they still aren't demanding the kind of wages you're used to paying. With the tax exemption you'll get . . . Excuse me."

He picked up the phone.

"Yes," he said. "Yes . . . The Mallorquina at Caguas? Yes, of course. I do remember . . . Certainly . . . Delighted . . . Well, I'm going to be busy this afternoon. How about a small libation later? . . . Fine. Suppose you meet me at the Club Naútico at six o'clock . . . Not at all, it'll be a pleasure!"

## IV

To Mr. Quire the word "pleasure" began to seem a wholly inadequate description of their meeting. After he had listened attentively for some time he felt like a man who had been personally introduced to Santa Claus.

"Do you mean," he said, "that the Ogden H. Kiel Foundation would consider handing me, say, a million dollars to disburse here as I saw fit?"

"That would be the idea," said the Saint. "You see," he went on, glibly appropriating the speech which Tristan Brown had generously provided for him, "we don't just write checks to organized charities, yet we obviously can't deal with thousands of individual cases. So in each area we go into we try to find a good local administrator, give him an allocation, and leave the handling of it to his judgment."

"There is certainly a lot of good to be done here," said Mr. Quire, nodding more rapidly. "When the sugar market collapsed the Puerto Ricans didn't stop breeding. We've got the densest population on any American soil, more than six hundred to the square mile, and it's still growing. Even all the new industry that's been coming in can't absorb them. I'm afraid there will always be poverty and hardship here. But, may I ask, why did you happen to choose me?"

"As soon as I started to make inquiries I kept hearing your name mentioned as a local philanthropist."

"I have tried to do my small best for the island since I settled here," Mr. Quire said modestly. "Being retired from business, it keeps me occupied and helps me to feel I'm not altogether useless." His bright eyes blinked keenly through his glasses. "Now we

come to that, by the way, I don't think I even know your name—or didn't I hear it?"

The Saint did not hesitate for an instant.

"Brown," he said. "Tristan Brown." With unsurpassable confidence he added: "I know this must seem a rather fantastic situation, but it's easy for you to check up on. Just send a wire to the Ogden H. Kiel Foundation in New York and ask them about me."

Mr. Quire continued to gaze at him shrewdly.

"Then our meeting the other day wasn't entirely an accident?"

"No, it was purely coincidence. But when your name came up, I remembered having seen you in action, so to speak." The Saint frowned. "To be perfectly frank, I've been just a little worried about that."

"In what way, sir?"

"About the last things you said to that man."

"Gamma?" Mr. Quire smiled. The smile ripened gradually into a resonant jolly chuckle, deep in his chest, the chortle of a good guy enjoying a good joke. "My dear fellow! How you must have misunderstood me. But of course you're new to these parts. Puerto Ricans are Latins, and they're used to violent expressions. In fact, they don't understand any other kind. And now and again you have to scold them, just like you would a child, and let them know you really mean business.

"Certainly, I was putting the fear of God into Pedro, because that's what he needed. But by this time he's thought it over, and we'll be able to work something out. Before we're finished, he'll be telling everyone I'm his best friend."

"I'm glad to hear that." Simon looked relieved. "Because our investigation has to be very thorough. As a matter of fact, one of our requirements is to have the person we are considering submit a list of everyone he has done any kind of business with for the past five years. Then we interview those people. Naturally, if any one of them gives the impression that he's had a raw deal, or been taken advantage of in any way, the application is probably dropped right there. Would you be prepared to go along with that?"

Mr. Quire rubbed his chin.

"A list like that would take me a little time," he said. "But, yes, I could let you have one."

"There's just one other thing," said the Saint.

Since he had already stolen so much of Tristan Brown's material he saw no reason to waste the rest of the act which he had projected for her in his own skeptical mind and unjustly suspected her of leading up to.

"The late Mr. Kiel," he said, "started off keeping his money in an old sock, and never really got

used to the idea of banks. And financial statements, to him, were just a way for clever accountants to make a bankrupt look prosperous. His will expressly forbids us to accept references of that kind. But obviously we have to have some guarantee that the person we're considering is sufficiently well off not to be tempted by the opportunities we'd be giving him. So we ask him to show us a substantial amount of cash."

"What sort of amount, Mr. Brown?"

"At least twenty thousand dollars. We have to see it in actual currency. Then it's deposited somewhere—in the applicant's own name, of course—and has to stay there until our investigation is completed. The object is just to establish that he has that kind of money that he can get along without."

Mr. Quire put his fingertips together. Simon had the impression that if he had been a cat he would have purred.

"Of course I can meet that condition too. But you're giving me quite a lot to do. When would you want to go into all this?"

"The sooner the better."

Mr. Quire made a rapid calculation. The Saint could visualize every step of it as if he looked into Mr. Quire's mind through a window. So long to set things right with certain people like Pedro Gamma, who might expose embarrassing angles of his philanthropy. So long to get a cable reply from New York—for although Mr. Quire's cupidity might rise to the right bait as quickly as anyone's, he was not the volatile type that gulps down the Colossal Lie without a test.

But with the wire he had himself received from New York warm in his pocket, and the exact wording of it clear in his memory, Simon could envisage that prospect with complete equanimity.

"How about the day after tomorrow?"

"That suits me," said the Saint. "Why not meet me for lunch at my hotel?"

The hotel he named was not the one where he and Tristan were staying, but the one where he intended to register forthwith under his borrowed name.

"I'll be there at one," said Mr. Quire. "And I'll try to bring my deposit."

"And I hope," said the Saint cordially, as they shook hands, "that we'll soon be entrusting you with a lot more than that."

He took one of his suitcases to the other hotel and checked in, and decided to have dinner and sleep there. The rest of the evening seemed flat and unpromising. He missed Tristan Brown, and wished she had been available for some sort of celebration that would have supplied an outlet for his suppressed exhilaration —even though he knew that his

providential absence was as valuable to this stage of the story as his fortunate meeting with her had been to its early development.

He was up very early the next morning, for he had certain errands to do which included another drive to Caguas and, later, the making of airplane reservations. But those things only occupied him until lunch. He drove out for a swim at Luquillo Beach and lay on the smooth sand until sundown. Then he went back to his original hotel hoping that Tristan would have returned.

She still hadn't come in by eight o'clock, and he went out to dinner and then to the Club 88 where he tried to divert himself with some of the amenable ladies who frequented the bar. But he couldn't develop even a superficial interest, and gave it up early and went home. Tristan was still away.

The next morning was better. The impatient excitement that the Saint always felt at the approaching climax of a beautifully dovetailed plot, as a mechanical craftsman might be enraptured by the working of an exquisitely contrived machine, was subordinated to the solid purpose of wrapping it up and handing it over to history.

He slept late and luxuriously, breakfasted, sunned, swam, shaved, showered, and dressed himself with detailed care and enjoyment, as if to make himself feel that everything behind him was perfect and ready for the crowning touch of perfection to come.

He took care to be waiting in his room at the right hotel for Mr. Quire to announce his arrival from the lobby, and came down to the meeting like a buccaneer to the deck of a prize.

It made no difference to him that the basic routine was one of the oldest in the time-honored confidence game. It was the rightness, the aptness, the neatness, and the justice of the situation that made it worthwhile; and he could no more have withheld anything from his performance than an actor with grease paint in his veins could have walked through the part of Hamlet.

"Here is the list you asked for," said Mr. Quire, when they were settled in a corner of the terrace bar with a couple of tall frosted Pimm's Cups.

Simon scanned through the closely typewritten sheet and observed that the name of Pedro Gamma was on it.

"And here," said Mr. Quire, "is the money."

He produced a thick bundle of hundred dollar bills. Simon nonchalantly began to count them.

"I hope you're not worried about giving this to me," he murmured.

"Not a bit," said Mr. Quire cheerfully. "To be honest, I did send a wire to New York, as you suggested, and I had a reply from

your Mr. Tantrum this morning. He gave you a good reference."

"Just the same," said the Saint, "I'd rather not be responsible for this much cash. Let's put it in the hotel safe before anything happens to it."

They went together to the hotel desk and asked for a deposit envelope. Mr. Quire himself put the money in it and sealed it. The Saint took it for a moment to examine the flap and press it down more firmly, and turned very slightly to call the clerk back.

In that infinitesimal moment the envelope passed under the open front of his jacket and a duplicate envelope, which he had obtained beforehand and stuffed with a suitable number of rectangles of newspaper, took its place and was handed to the clerk.

Mr. Quire signed his name in the space provided on the envelope, and received the receipt. Then they went back to their drinks.

"It's okay for you to keep the receipt," said the Saint carelessly. "That part is only a formality anyhow. Just so long as we go together to get the envelope back later—and it hasn't been touched in the meantime. That way, I can truthfully say that your bond has been on deposit, yet I don't have the responsibility for it."

"I quite understand," said Mr. Quire. He took a healthy mouthful from his glass, and Simon was almost moved to compassion by the prodigious effort he made to appear unconcerned as he went on: "Er—would you have any idea how long it's likely to be?"

"Before you get your money back, or before we give you some of ours?"

"Well, both."

"If I don't have too much trouble locating the people on your list, I might be able to make my report in a week. As soon as that's done, I can release your deposit. The board in New York will act pretty promptly on my recommendation. Sometimes I've known them to send the first hundred thousand almost by return mail."

Even if Mr. Quire took steps to keep in touch with several of the names on his list, which in his eagerness to see the investigation completed he would very likely do, it would be at least two days before he became seriously perturbed by a gradual realization that nobody he checked with had yet been interviewed, and at least twenty-four hours more before growing uneasiness and busier inquiries made him suspicious enough to risk going back for a peek in the envelope where his deposit was supposedly resting.

Simon could, therefore, figure that he had a minimum of three days, and even longer with a little luck, in which to remove himself to other hunting-grounds and cover his back trail; and in an age of air travel that gave him the

whole world to get lost in. But even so, the lunch that he had to sit through was an ordeal, for it was not only an anticlimactic waste of time but it also obliged him to listen for two hours to Mr. Quire's nauseating hypocrisies about the good deeds he planned to do with his foundation grant when he got it.

It felt more like two months before the Saint was gracefully able to escort Mr. Quire through the lobby on his way out.

"Don't expect to see much of me for a few days," he said. "As a matter of fact, I noticed that some of the references you gave me were in Ponce and other towns, and I've a good mind to pack up and go touring. It'll give me a chance to see some of the island while I look them up. I'll probably do that first."

They strolled through the wide entrance. In the driveway outside a girl with her back to them was saying good-bye to a middle-aged man and woman in a car. With an exchange of hand-waves, the car drove off, and she turned. It was Tristan Brown.

"It'll wait till I hear from you," said Mr. Quire contentedly. "And thanks for the lunch."

She was hardly more than an arm's length away and her momentary surprise at coming face to face with the Saint was changing to a quick smile. The Saint had no idea what his own expression was, but he became aware that Mr. Quire was holding out a hand. He took it mechanically.

"It's been a great pleasure meeting you," said Mr. Quire, with dreadful distinctness. *"Au revoir,* Mr. Brown."

## V

All around them the tourists and business men, guests and visitors, doormen and taxi drivers, criss-crossed and prattled and honked about their sundry affairs. But Simon Templar felt as if he was marooned in a crystal sphere of utter stillness and isolation that shut out all sound and bustle as if it were taking place in another parallel dimension.

He could see the name hit the girl's ears like an intangible blow, see her stop dead in her tracks with the smile fading frozenly from her face. He could feel his physical body shaking Mr. Quire's hand, heard his voice muttering some commonplace farewell. He felt her stare resting on him like a searchlight, and through each long-drawn second he waited for her voice to say something, anything, the inevitable words that would lead inevitably into an unpredictable morass of disaster.

But she didn't speak.

He watched Mr. Quire cross over to his large black Cadillac, get in and drive away. And still she had not spoken.

Then he had to look at her again.

She was still standing there, a bellhop behind her patiently holding a light valise.

"Well," she said finally. "Mr. Brown."

"Fancy meeting you," he said.

"Mr. *Tristan* Brown, of course."

"Of course," said the Saint. He eyed her speculatively. "I suppose it wouldn't even be any use telling you I wasn't talking to Mr. Quire about the Ogden H. Kiel Foundation."

"None at all. Why perjure yourself, on top of everything else?"

"All right, tell me the rest."

"I'm only wondering how much bond he put up to have himself considered as a possible administrator for Puerto Rico."

"Twenty thousand dollars, to be exact."

"In a sealed envelope which is now full of waste paper."

"I can see you've read stories."

"Dozens of them."

The conversation was definitely lagging.

Simon searched hazily for another approach, and suddenly it was literally thrown at him in the person of a thin excited threadbare man who erupted from somewhere and practically flung himself on the Saint's neck. He hugged the Saint with both arms, slapped him on the back, grasped his hands and wrung them, gargled incoherently for several seconds before he could get a word out.

"*Señor* Brown! *Le buscaba en todos los hotels*—I know I will find you somewhere! I had to tell you—"

He went on in a torrent of yattering Spanish.

Simon listened for a while, finally was able to subdue him. Then he turned to the girl.

"Excuse me," he said. "May I introduce Mr. Pedro Gamma? I told you about him once, if you remember. He's just telling me that Mr. Quire introduced him to the vice-president of a state-side textile company who's looking for a factory site here, and Quire gave Pedro his mortgage back and told him what you say it is worth, and and just pay back the loan. So Pedro showed him the place today, and the guy grabbed it."

"*Si, señor.* And as you tell me something like this may happen when you come to see me, I ask him what you say it is worth, and he does not bargain at all. We make the escrow already—for fifteen thousand dollars!"

"I'm glad to hear it," said the Saint. "But I'm busy right now. Why don't you run along home and tell your wife?"

"*Si, señor!*" The little man beamed at Tristan. "I understand. *Perdone, señora.* But I had to tell . . ."

He scuttled away in radiant confusion.

Simon turned to the girl again.

"You see," he explained, "I also told Quire that he'd have to give us a list of all his business

deals for some years back, and that they'd all be investigated. I figured that would send him rushing around to straighten out some of his old fast shuffles."

Then he saw that her smile had come back at last.

"We can't just stand here all afternoon," she said.

She looked around for the bellhop, but he had long ago put down her bag and gone off to gossip with the doorman. He came running back, but Simon gave him a coin and picked up the valise himself. He led her across the lobby to a secluded corner and they sat down.

"Now if the defendant may ask a question," said the Saint, prodding the bag with his toe, "what are *you* doing here with this?"

"The people I made that trip with just dropped me off, and I was going to check in."

"We had a nice cosy hotel. This is a gaudy and ghastly tourist trap, where even the newsstand has its own fancy prices on cigarettes and magazines. Why change?"

She gazed at him levelly. "Maybe I thought I'd better stay away from someone I was getting to like too much."

"And now, to top it all, you find you've got to decide whether to turn him in to the cops."

"I don't know why I'm even hesitating. Except that he seems to manage to do such saintly things on the side. It's a hell of a spot for a lawyer to be in." She rubbed a tired hand across her eyes. "I'll have to think."

"Why don't you do that?" he suggested. "Take a shower, have a nap, get rested and freshened up—and meet me for cocktails and dinner. Let's be as sophisticated as that, anyway. Then you can decide whether I sleep in the hoosegow or—"

"But shouldn't you be, as the phrase goes, on the lam?"

"I'm in no hurry till tomorrow. Quire won't suspect anything for days. When he does find out there's a sporting chance that he'll feel too foolish to squawk. The last thing a guy like that can face is looking ridiculous. I'm not gambling on it, but I've got plenty of time."

"All right," she said.

She stood up. He picked up her bag again and walked with her towards the desk.

"You've taken my name. Now what can I register as?"

"How about something nice and feminine," said the Saint, "like Isolde?"

She looked up at him, so shameless and debonair, so reckless and impudent even with the shadow of prison bars across his path and her own hand empowered to drop the gate on him, a careless corsair with nothing but laughter in his eyes. And her white teeth bit down on her lip.

"Oh, damn you," she said. "Damn you, damn you!"

# the third degree

*by . . . Arthur Somers Roche*

**The little guy confessed murder and had three witnesses to say he did it but Corcoran wanted proof.**

THEY BROUGHT in Whitey Johns while Captain Corcoran was working me over. "Now, listen, Smiley," said the Captain. "A court stenographer is going to take down every single word you say. Get that through your dumb brain. Now I ask you again—for the last time—do you want a lawyer or do you still insist upon acting as your own attorney?"

I laughed right in his face again. The station sergeant, the plain-clothes bulls, and the rest of the Captain's yes-men were there to see it.

"I don't need a lawyer," I said. "I plead guilty. What more do you cops want—blood?"

"I want the truth," the Captain snapped. "And I'm going to get it if I have to third-degree you."

"I'd smile at you, Captain, if the light was better in this cell," I said, "so's I could see your funny mug better. But I don't dig this jive about third-degree. Yankee's dead, ain't he? And I'm here, ain't? And I admit I shot him, don't I?"

"So you're a murderer?" he said. "Did anybody ever tell you that if you can't prove motive it's second degree? No, it don't stack,

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*One of the finest story-tellers of his time, Arthur Somers Roche was more famous for his serials of high romance that appeared in such magazines as* Collier's, *than for his short stories. But some of the shorts were memorable stories and this yarn we have selected is one of his very best.*

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Smiley. You're a petty thief, but I can't see you as a killer. Don't you realize you'll fry for murder?"

"All right, lemme fry," I said. "Only lemme alone now."

He don't answer me, but turns to Whitey. "Is this the guy that shot Yankee?" he asked.

"Why, sure he is. Didn't I see him do it myself?" said Whitey.

"Let me ask the questions," said the Captain. "You saw him, did you?"

"Like I'm seeing you now, Captain," said Whitey.

"Well, how'd it happen?" asked the Captain.

"Well, it's like this," said Whitey. "We're all sitting in Dutch Red's, me and Yankee and Bull Mitchell and Corny Pop—just the four of us—sitting there waiting, and—"

"Waiting for what?" asked the Captain. Nobody's sucker, that guy.

"Just waitin'," said Whitey, and he isn't anybody's sucker either.

"What were you talking about?"

"You know," said Whitey, "this and that. About the big fight and the Giants and the Dodgers."

"Just a bunch of good-natured business men," said the Cap. "So, what happened?"

"Well," said Whitey, "in comes Smiley here and he pulls his heater—"

"And I shoot Yankee," I put in.

"You'll get your turn again, Smiley," said the Captain. He looks back at Whitey. "Well, wasn't there anything said between Smiley and Yankee before the shooting."

"Sure there was," said Whitey. "Smiley, as he pulls his rod, says to Yankee, 'Well, rat,' he says, 'will you take it lying down or have you got the guts to shoot it out?' ".

"And then what?" asked the Captain.

"Why," said Whitey, "Yankee don't say a word so Smiley lets him have it."

"And what's Yankee doing?" asked the Cap.

"Why, he don't do nothing," said Whitey. "He don't have a chance. He's dead before he hits the floor."

"And the rest of you boys? I suppose you just sit there, eh?" said the Captain.

"Well, what else can we do? Unarmed like we was."

"Not a gun on the four of you, eh?" said the Captain.

"Well, you searched us, didn't you? Even Yankee's body didn't have a gun on it. Remember?"

"Yes, we searched you all," said the Captain. "Well," he said, "didn't Yankee know that Smiley was gunning for him?"

"Why should he?" asked Whitey.

"I'm asking you," said the Captain.

"Sure, he don't," said Whitey.

"Never any argument between the two of them?" asked the Captain.

"Why," said Whitey, "just before Smiley came in Yankee is telling us what a grand guy Smiley is."

"Oh," said the Captain, "then you *were* talking about something else besides baseball and the fight?"

"Well, that's all," said Whitey.

"Take him out and lock him in a cell," said the Captain to one of his stooges. "I've known that to help a thug's memory."

He gets his laugh again from his yes-men, and they take Whitey out. "Bring in Corny Papopoulos," said the Captain.

"Aw," said I, "this is gettin' monotonous, Captain. I'm guilty. So what the hell? Why bring in that fat Greek? I wanta sleep."

"You'll get plenty of sleep when they strap you in that chair, Smiley," said the Captain.

So they brought in Corny Pop.

"Sure, that's Smiley," he said, "and I saw him shoot Yankee Ganz."

"Why did he kill him?"

"Now you got me," said Corny. "I thought they was buddies. You could have knocked me over with a feather when Smiley pulled a rod and let Yankee have it."

"Just went off his nut, eh?" said the Captain. "Blanked out temporarily and shot his best pal? Is that it?"

"Now what do you mean by that?" asked Corny. "Say, Captain, you're too smart to let Smiley pull any nut defense, ain't you? No, he don't go off his nut. He's calm like he is now, just a cold-blooded murderer who bumped off his best friend for nothing."

"And where were you all this time while your pal is being cooled?" asked the Captain.

"Me? Why, I'm under the table," said Corny. "Without even a toothpick on me to hit Smiley with! Why, I'm under the table."

"Take him to a cell," said the Captain to the Sergeant. "And bring in Bull Mitchell."

So they brought in the Bull.

"Well, Bull," said the Captain, "suppose you tell us all about it."

"Why," said Bull, "it's like this. Four of us are sitting in the Dutch's joint and in comes Smiley, hollers that Yankee is a rat, pulls his rod and lets Yankee have it. Just plain murder."

"Dreadful," said the Captain. "Shocking. A nice young lad like Yankee, who never did anything worse than peddle dope to school kids or stick up a payroll, and Smiley shoots him down in cold blood."

"Aw," said the Bull, "Yankee wasn't so bad. Anyway, Smiley ain't got no reason to do what he did, at least *I* don't know it if he has."

"Friends too, weren't they?" asked the Captain.

"Why, sure they was," said the Bull.

"Never heard of any quarrel

between them, did you?" asked the Captain.

The Bull shook his head. "Why, they was pals, Cap."

"Well, wasn't that sweet?" said the Captain. He looks at the Sergeant, nods. "Well," he said, "put the Bull in *his* corral." He looks around at the rest of his stooges, says, "The rest of you guys blow, too. I want to talk to Smiley alone."

So they took the Bull away and left me alone with the Captain. He gave me that fishy stare of his, and I knew what was coming. One tough baby, Captain Corcoran.

"Well," he said, "come clean, Smiley."

"Aw, take a walk," I told him.

"The only walk I'm going to take is when we parade you to the chair," he said.

"Well, you ain't heard me crabbing about it," I said. "So why don't you get out of here and let me sleep."

"You don't want a lawyer?"

"No," I said, "I don't want a lawyer."

"Where'd you get the gun you shot Yankee with?" he asked.

"I bought it," I said.

"Where'd you buy it?" he asked.

"Oh, in America," I said. "Or maybe it was in Europe. I forget."

"So you won't talk, eh, Smiley?" he asked.

"No, I ain't gonna talk."

"There's ways of making you talk," he said.

I said, "You don't tell me, Captain Corcoran. Now, ain't that interesting?"

"What did you and Yankee quarrel about?" he asked.

"Well, lemme think," I said. "I can't seem to recall . . . Why don't you leave me alone for a while, Captain. I'll sort of struggle with this memory of mine and maybe—"

"I'd rather stick around and watch the struggle," he said. "Ever heard of the third degree, Smiley?"

"The third degree?" I said.

"Yes, the third degree," he said.

"Oh," I said, "that's what you bulls do to a jerk you can scare, isn't it? But how the hell you gonna scare a guy that's *asking* for the chair, Captain?"

He changes the subject.

"Where did you sleep last night, Smiley?" he asked.

"On my back," said I.

"Your back, eh?" he said.

"Yes," I said, "leastwise until about dawn when I turned over on my side."

"And when did you get up, Smiley?" he asked.

"Just as soon as I got through sleeping," I told him.

"And when you got up where did you go?" he asked.

"Out," I told him.

"Yes, it's a lot nicer out than in, on a pleasant fall day," said the Captain. "I suppose you got tired of having Yankee boss you around?"

"What else do you suppose, Captain?" I asked him.

"You killed Yankee Ganz at about five-forty this afternoon," he said.

"Yes," I said, "I was several years late."

"Why didn't you kill him when you had lunch with him?" he asked.

"When I had lunch with him?" I said.

"Yes, when you had lunch with him," he said. "You and he were laughing and kidding in Randall's diner like a couple of buddies, weren't you?"

"You can't kill a guy on a full stomach, Captain," I said.

"Where did you go after you left Yankee?" he asked.

"Well," I said, "that's a tough one. There was Mrs. Astor's tea, and that musical at the Biltmore—"

He laughed. "Smiley, you're living up to your nickname, all right. Have a cigarette?"

"Sure, I'll have a cigarette," I said.

He handed me his cigarette case and he won that inning when I saw the case.

"Where did you get that case?" I blurted out.

"This case?" he said. "Why, Smiley? What's so interesting about this case?"

I clam up. He'd got me with a fast one.

He laughed again. "Well, Smiley," he said, "I'm a married man, but you ain't never going to see my Missus so I guess it won't matter if I tell you where did I get that case."

I wait, watching him.

"Well," he said, "a gal that's stuck on me gave it—"

"You're lying," I said.

"Now, Smiley," he said, "what kind of talk is that? If I happen to be keeping a babe—"

I went for him then, but he's six feet one and he stopped me dead with an uppercut. I went down hard.

"By God," I said, "if I had a rod—"

He stands over me.

"Why, you cheap punk," he said, "why didn't you pick *my* gun out of my pocket the way you did Yankee's? Then I'd be unarmed like he was."

"He was not," I said, "he had another gun."

He walks across the cell and sits down. I got up and dusted off my clothes. "Why did Yankee give you a gun?" he asked.

"Because they don't serve toothpicks in Randall's diner and I needed something to pick a tooth that ought to be filled," I said.

He grinned at me. "You're sure full of wisecracks, Smiley. I don't blame this gal of mine for falling for you."

"What gal?" I asked.

"The one that give me this cigarette case," he said.

"Oh, that one," I said.

"Yes, that one. A sweet kid,

too. Of course, double-crossing me with you wasn't nice, but what can you expect of a girl brought up like her? But I never would have taken the case if I'd known some other guy gave it to her."

"No," I said, "I don't suppose you would."

"And I certainly wouldn't have let you see it if I'd known *you* were the boy that bought it for her."

"No, I know you wouldn't," I said.

"I knew she was playing around," he said, "but I didn't know the guy was you."

"No, how could you?" I said.

"Where did you go after you left Yankee in the diner?" he asked.

I looked at him straight. "Well, if you gotta have it," I said, "I'll give it to you. I kept a date with your wife."

He leans back on the bunk where he's sitting and laughs out loud. "Smiley," he said, "I guess I had that one coming to me."

"Yes," I said, "and more besides."

"Because," he said, "she *is* a nice gal."

"Who is?" I asked.

"Marie Manning," he said.

"Marie Manning?" I said. "Who's she?"

"Marie Manning, the girl that helped you bump off Yankee Ganz," he said.

"You heard Bull and Corny and Whitey," I said. "I didn't hear them mention any Marie Manning."

"No, you didn't hear them. But you're hearing me," he said. "Marie is a cute kid, Smiley, but let's face it—she's also a bum."

I said, "Get your rod out, because you ain't going to stop me with any fist this time."

He's fast as lightning, in spite of age and size, and he manages to duck. And this time he pins both my arms behind me.

"All right, Smiley," he said. "I'll lay off. The little girl's decent, I know that. I wanted to know how you felt about her. Now I know."

He lets me go and I lean against the wall again.

"You're in love with her," he said.

"All right, so I'm nuts about her," I said.

"She deserves better than a dirty murderer," he said.

"Yes, she deserves better than that," I said.

"But she's stuck on you," he said.

"Well, all right," I said.

"Where did you go after you left Randall's diner?" he asked.

"Oh, I walked around the Village," I said.

"And you met Marie Manning and the two of you framed it to kill Yankee, eh?" he said.

"She wasn't in on it," I said.

"Then why did she go to Dutch Red's with you when you gunned Yankee?"

"Who says she did?" I asked.

"I say she did," he said.

"You lie," I said.

He got up off the bunk. "Well, Smiley," he said, "I've given you every chance and you won't come clean. You're a cheap crook, Smiley, but I thought you'd be man enough to clear the girl."

"What do you mean, clear the girl?" I asked.

"Why, you sap," he said, "I've got her in a cell, too. She helped you plan the kill and she was with you when you shot Yankee. She may duck the chair, but it's life anyway." He stood up. "Sweet dreams, Smiley. Sure you don't want a lawyer?"

I did some fast thinking. "Wait a minute, Cap," I said. "I've admitted killing Yankee. I did it all by myself. No one else was in on it. What else do you want?"

"I want the truth," he said. "I want to know *why?*"

"Why?" I asked.

"Why you killed Yankee," he said.

"Well, what difference does it make?" I asked.

"None at all to you, but plenty to the girl," he said.

"Yankee wanted her old man out of the way," I said.

"Why?" he asked.

"Because Manning had something on Yankee," I said.

"What?" he asked.

"I don't know," I said. "All I know is that Yankee said that Manning hated him like poison, that he'd been laying for Yankee for three or four years, and that now he had something on him and he was going to the cops with the evidence. So Yankee asks me to knock off Manning for him."

"But you're not a killer, Smiley," said the Captain. "The worst we've ever had against you is that you hang around with a tough bunch, gamble, play the horses. But your name has never even been on a station blotter. You've always had a job, until now."

"Yes, I've been a working stiff," I said. "But what with the dockmen's strike and not having any dough, and seeing Yankee's boys loaded with dough—well, I decided to do a job for Yankee."

"So you decided to turn crooked, eh?" he asked.

"Yes. I decided to turn crooked," I said.

"But turning crooked and turning killer, there's a big difference," he said. "You're not a killer, Smiley. You're not the type."

"Well," I said, "Yankee wouldn't let me in on anything unless I went the whole way. I had to prove myself. I figured that if I was going to join the gang, I might as well go the whole way. I hadda have dough, Captain, and I wanted it now, right away."

"The girl?" he asked.

"Say," I said, "if I come clean, she's out of it, ain't she? You'll clear her and let her go?"

"I'll play square with you—and her—if you play square with me, Smiley," he said. "Go on."

"Well, I took on a job after a talk with Yankee in the diner," I said. "Yankee gives me his gun and describes Manning."

"Describes him?" asked the Captain. "You mean he doesn't tell you his name? Just describes him to you?"

"Yes, describes him," I said.

He said, "You mean to tell me you agreed to kill a guy when you don't even know his name?"

I said, "Do you suppose if I'd known it was my girl's father I'd have taken the job on? Yankee says to follow him, that he's going to meet a guy that has it in for him. He'll talk to the guy. When he leaves him I'm to step up and let him have it. That's all."

"Smiley, when you turned, you *turned,* didn't you?" said the Captain.

I said, "I'll take the chair but I won't take any lecture."

"All right," he said. "Give me the rest of it."

"Well," I said, "I followed Yankee, saw him meet a white-haired old gent."

"Your girl's old man?" he asked.

"Yes, but I didn't know that then," I said.

"You didn't know your girl's old man? Didn't even know him by sight? That doesn't sound right," he said.

"Can't you take my word for it?" I asked.

"I want *all* the truth," he said.

"Well, all right," I said. "You see—oh, hell, Cap, here's how it was: I meet Marie last summer—a friend of mine introduces us at Coney Island. I go for her the minute I see her. And—well, she don't hate me. I ride home in the subway with her, and—well, I come clean with her. I ain't got a job and damn little dough.

"She tells me her old man hates loafers. He hates the guys I hang out with. She's seen me with Yankee Ganz and she says her father hates Yankee and his gang worse than anything in the world. Says her old man is a hard-working guy and won't let her have nothing to do with the kinda guys I associate with. She tells me that she likes me, too, but she won't see me, won't bring me around to see her old man, until I got a job. So, that's why I don't know her old man. I'm broke, no job, I'm a bum."

"You had dough enough to give her this cigarette case," he said.

"I had it before we met," I told him. "I just had her initials put on it."

"Go on," he said. "What happened after you agreed to do the job for Yankee?"

"Well, as I'm following old man Manning—"

"You were going to kill him?" asked the Captain.

"Ain't I telling you?" I said.

"I'm following him and who comes up but Marie. She was hurrying along after her father and she tells me as she passes me that she can't stop because she wants to speak to her old man. She points out her old man, and it's the man I'm supposed to gun. I guess I turn white or something, because she asks me some questions, and well, Captain, then and there, I come clean, I tell her."

"And what did she say?" he asked.

I looked him square in the eye. "She didn't say much. She ain't that kind. She's a girl that can understand how a man, broke and crazy in love—oh, what the hell! I'm a dog, I know it. But she—my God, she's a saint, and—she forgave me. And that's all."

"Oh, is it?" he said. "I want to know why you killed Yankee."

"And I told you!" I said. "I killed him because he hired me to kill my girl's father."

"Oh, did he know Marie Manning was your girl?" asked the Captain.

"No," I said. "Nobody knew that I was going around with her. She—she's different from the girls the gang hangs out with."

"Then if Yankee didn't know Manning was your girl's old man, why get sore at him?" asked the Captain.

"Well," I said, "I sort of went off my nut, I guess."

"The Bull and Corny and Whitey don't talk as if you were off your nut. You walked in cold-blooded, was what they said. They was all facing the door when you went into Dutch Red's, weren't they?"

"Sure they were," I told him.

"Your girl stuck with you a while this afternoon, didn't she?" he asked. "Don't lie, Smiley. The minute you were brought in we checked on you, found out about the girl, and I went to see her. Why did she stay with you this afternoon?"

"Well, she was afraid I'd do something to Yankee," I said.

"Why was she afraid of that?" he asked.

"Well, like I'm telling you, I was sore at him for hiring me to kill her old man," I said.

"And it made you sorer when she told you what Yankee had done to her father, didn't it?" he asked.

"Sure, it did," I said.

"Well, that was natural," he said. "I'm glad you've come clean, Smiley."

He rose, threw his cigarette on the floor and stepped on it. "Sorry, Smiley, but I guess it's the chair for you," he said.

"But you'll let Marie go?" I asked.

"Why, sure I will," he said. "Now that you've come clean, I can see she had nothing to do with it. Say, what was it that Yankee did to her old man?"

"Why," I said, "why—"

He jumped me then, took me

by surprise. Both his hands got my throat and he banged my head against the wall.

"Come clean, damn you!" he shouted. "Yankee didn't do a thing to Manning. It was the girl—the girl, Smiley. That's why her father hated Yankee, that's why he was laying for Yankee, and that's why Yankee wanted him killed.

"And when the girl told you what Yankee had done to her, three or four years ago, when she was only fifteen—that's why you went and shot it out with Yankee. Don't lie to me, you rat! Come clean, Smiley, come clean, or by God, I'll kill you right in this cell!"

He let go of me then and I got my breath.

"You're a liar," I said. "Marie Manning is a straight kid—she's as straight as your wife, Corcoran, as straight as your daughter, as straight as your mother . . . If you think I'm going to hide behind her skirts—"

He turned and walked to the cell door. Over his shoulder he tossed a question at me.

"Marie forgave you, eh? And she believed you when you told her you'd never turn crooked again, eh?"

"Yes, she believed me," I told him.

"Yes she did," he sneered. "So why did she take the gun away from you? Was she afraid you wouldn't keep your word?"

"She didn't take it," I said. "I *gave* it to her so she'd *know* I meant what I said."

"That's it," said Captain Corcoran. He was smiling now. "Well, Smiley, I'm much obliged to you. So you gave Marie the gun and she went straight down to Dutch Red's and killed Yankee."

I could have cut my tongue out. "She never went near the Dutch's!" I cried. "I was with her every minute, until after supper."

"Then," said Corcoran, "if she didn't go there, and you were with her—who killed Yankee? You don't like to answer that one, do you, Smiley? So, I'll answer it for you: Marie took you to her father and you told him how Yankee had hired you to kill him. And Marie turned the gun over to her old man. Then you and Marie went for a walk.

"But Yankee Ganz was *killed with his own gun.* The murderer dropped it after the killing, and it's been identified as Yankee's gun. I guess anybody can add it up now, Smiley. The old man, brooding about what Yankee did to his daughter, now knew that Yankee was planning to get him bumped off, so—"

"You're wrong," I said. "Bull and Corny and Whitey all told you I done it. Why would they lie?"

"And why wouldn't they?" he said. "If they don't pin it on you, maybe it'll be pinned on them.

They all sat with their backs to the door, in Dutch Red's. They didn't *see* who shot Yankee. That I know. Those three bums hear a gun blast and they slide under the table. I got the story from Dutch Red himself. A gun shot . . . Yankee slumps . . . Front door slams . . . When the other three guys come out from under the table, the killer's gone.

"Dutch Red found the gun where the killer dropped it, outside the diner. It's Yankee's gun and they know Yankee gave it to you. That's enough for them, even if they didn't see the murderer. But they want to convince me. So the rest of their story—about the talk you gave Yankee—they make that up."

"Well," said I, "you're a smart copper. You've third-degreed me. But you've got no witnesses to what I've let slip, and I'll watch my step from now on. I repeat, Corcoran—I was the one who killed Yankee Ganz."

"And if you said anything else, my lad," he said, "I'd let you fry. But a guy that'll take the chair to protect his girl and her old man . . . Say, Smiley, because a girl of fifteen is attacked by a rat like Yankee, that doesn't mean she's not all right. So, Smiley, you're going to marry that girl—or I'll run you in."

"I would! I would!" I cried. "But Cap, her father—I won't let—"

"Don't worry about the old man," he said. "I'll third-degree the Bull, Corny and Whitey again. When they admit they didn't *see* the killer—"

"But everybody that was in here heard me confess," I said.

"Sure, you confessed, because you thought your girl did it, Smiley. You confessed to protect her."

"I won't do it," I said. "I ain't going to let it get around that she, that Yankee—"

He smiled at me. "Nobody is going to know what Yankee did to Marie five years ago, kid. The story is this: your girl knew that you and Yankee had quarreled. She thought Yankee would kill you. So she went gunning for Yankee. That's what you thought, and that's why you stood for the frame. You thought she killed Yankee to protect you. Why, Smiley, you come out of this fine. And listen, Smiley, I like you. You've got guts. *I'll* get you a job, Smiley. Then you and Marie can get married."

"But her old man," I cried.

"Her old man?" he said. "Why listen, Smiley, if a gangster like Yankee put his hand on *my* daughter, *I'd* kill him. Many a time the cops are roasted because we don't find the gangster that killed another gangster. I guess we can stand one more roast. You tell old man Manning to sit tight. Nobody knows who killed Yankee but you and me. And I ain't going to tell."

I looked at him. He was a smart guy, this Corcoran. Maybe, having third-degreed the truth out of me, he'd double-cross me, grab Marie's father . . .

"You ain't going to tell?" I asked.

"No," he said. "I couldn't be best man at your wedding, then try to put your father-in-law in the chair, could I?"

"No," said I, "you couldn't do that, Captain. But say,, if you knew all along—"

He said, "All I knew was that Dutch Red said he'd been in the room a second before the shot was fired, and he noticed how the four guys at that table were sitting. When he came back into the room—after the shot was fired—the killer was gone, three of the boys were under the table and Yankee was dead. But the chairs are still placed back to the door, so how could they have seen the killer? And when three crooks all tell the *same story*—and when your girl says she was with you all afternoon—well, either she's lying or you're protecting someone, Smiley. And I won't let any man go to the chair for a killing he didn't do. The third degree, Smiley, is used to find out the *truth*."

He walked to the cell door. At the top of his lungs he yelled, "Bring those three yeggs back here! Framing a decent boy who stands for it because he's afraid that if he brings his girl in to prove an alibi something will be pinned on her. Bring the rats in! Dutch Red told me how they were all sitting with their backs to the door, and he swears he could have heard their voices if Smiley and Yankee had talked. Smiley wasn't there. So those thugs must have been trying to frame Smiley so's it won't be pinned on them. Bring the rats in!"

He turned to me, flung the cell door open. "On your way, lad," he said. "But come down tomorrow and I'll have that job for you. Thursday's my night off. We'll have the wedding supper at my house and, lad, when you've tasted Mrs. Corcoran's steak and kidney pie—"

So I went out to meet Marie.

# the midway murder

*by . . . Octavus Roy Cohen*

**A yokel kid and a carney girl make mountain music together. This time it came out murder.**

WHEN GRAYSON'S Great Amalgamated Shows rolled into Cypress City and settled itself near the cotton mill at the far end of Main Street, somebody asked Jeff Ashley whether he expected any trouble. Jeff, chief of the town's small police force, said that he reckoned not, provided they didn't try any funny stuff.

Grayson's Great Amalgamated Shows was not a circus, as its name might have implied, but a drab and road-worn carnival. And small Southern towns had learned to be wary of carnivals. Some of them were all right, but some were iniquitous, bringing hooch dancers and gambling devices. Jeff was opposed to the off-color shows, but if this outfit was what its advance man claimed, he didn't expect any trouble.

"Chance fo' the folks to have some fun," Jeff said. "And gosh knows, Cypress City can do with some."

He rambled along the dusty path which was being transformed into a midway, a tall, gaunt man with deep-set eyes and a crooked engaging smile. He wore a badge but no uniform, and those to whom he introduced himself didn't seem to be overly impressed.

*The earthy realism of Octavus Roy Cohen's characters gives his stories a constant delight. And in this, his newest, he tells the story of a country kid who becomes a man as he fights his way out of a murder charge.*

He chatted with Mr. Grayson, who was short and chubby and had several gold teeth. He wished Mr. Grayson a good stay in Cypress City but warned him against violating certain ordinances. The owner of the carnival assured Jeff that even though his carnival wasn't the biggest or the newest in the world, it definitely was the cleanest.

Jeff smiled and said he hoped so. They shook hands and Jeff refused the twenty-dollar bill Mr. Grayson offered him. So when he walked away Mr. Grayson shook his head sadly and passed the word that they'd have to watch their step in Cypress City.

That night the carnival opened up and the citizens of Cypress City came out in full force to the transformed Carns' tract. Jeff Ashley, drifting through the brilliantly-lighted grounds, thought it looked like a pretty good outfit. The merry-go-round wheezed loudly and gaily, pitchmen exhorted strollers, the various rides —Ferris wheel, the Bug, the Whip, the Caterpillar—all seemed to be doing pretty well.

There were shows, too; a collection of freaks, a wax works, a mummified sea monster which was definitely malodorous, a beer-and-sandwich spot with a three-piece orchestra and dancing, an artists-and-models exhibit, a motordrome and, way down at the end of the midway, Harvey's Monster Athletic Carnival, featuring Slug Harvey, once contender for the world's middleweight crown.

"The great Slug Harvey will per-form here on each and every night," howled the barker. "Not only will he demonstrate the fine points of the manly art of self-defense, but, folks, he will also give the gigantic sum of fifty dollars—*fifty dollars,* folks—to any man in Cypress City who can stand up against him for the length of four rounds! Admission only twenty-five cents."

Yes, it was quite a carnival. The smell of hamburgers and hot dogs and onions and popcorn had vanquished the persuasive fragrance of the Southern spring, but Jeff Ashley admitted that the odor of a carnival in full swing wasn't the worst smell in the world.

He liked it, and if he kept a very close eye on the raffle wheels, ball rolling games, and other devices at which miraculously fortunate persons were awarded highly breakable kewpie dolls, stale candy, plaster statuettes, and other worthless gimcracks, that was only because he wanted to be mighty sure they didn't forget his edict against gambling. So long as there was a winner every time it didn't matter how much profit the concession might make.

Shortly before midnight Jeff spotted a group of boys lounging in front of a dingy tent which flaunted a sign reading *World's Most Beautiful and Famous Ori-*

*ental Dancers.* Below that a temporary sign had been hung announcing that the dancing was educational and instructive, but concealed by that temporary sign was the permanent inscription which promised the public that the dances were *Sizzling, Searing, Scorching.*

Jeff Ashley figured it wasn't unnatural that some of the young bucks should be gathered in front of that tent. Inside, according to the announcement, were four ravishing redheads . . . featuring Lola—the one and only Lola—whose contortions are amazing, astounding, *and* revealing. Tonight, of course, Lola and her associates had not contorted, nor had they been amazing, astounding, or revealing. But the young men in front of the tent had hope. Right now they were talking to the dancers.

Jeff was about to pass by, when he noticed a young man who was taller than his companions; a brown-haired, broad-shouldered, lean-flanked lad who was speaking to none other than the famous Lola. Jeff's eyes clouded and he walked across the midway, nodded to the others, and spoke to the tall young man.

He said, "Hello, Son."

Eddie Ashley looked up, flushed, then grinned. He said, "Howdye, Pop."

Lola looked from one to the other with shrewd, greenish-blue eyes. She was a right nice looking girl, this Lola, if you liked your curves obvious. You could tell that she'd been places and seen things.

"Havin' fun, Eddie?"

"Plenty."

"That's good." Jeff Ashley smiled at Lola and the other girls. "These young ladies work here?"

"Yeah." It was Lola speaking. "That all right with you, Constable?"

"Uh-huh. Fine." Jeff waved his hand and ambled on. Lola stared after him, then turned back to Eddie Ashley. "That your old man?"

"Yes."

"What's the medal he's wearing?"

"He's chief of police," explained Eddie.

"Jeez! In a burg this size?"

One of the other lads clapped Eddie on the back and spoke to Lola. "Better be nice to him, Sugarfoots. He's got influence."

"Yeah. . . ." Her eyes took on a speculative warmth. "What's it add up to, Eddie? You regular or not?"

That seemed to amuse Eddie Ashley's friends, and they spent the next ten minutes assuring Lola that Eddie was a hellion on wheels. Eddie grunted. "Aw lay off. Let me do my own boasting." But you could see that he was pleased, and that he hoped Lola was properly impressed.

Apparently she was, because when he asked her to go some-

where and have a sandwich and cup of coffee with him, she said she would. They walked off down the midway and one of the other girls shrugged and said, "The old marching song . . . tramp, tramp, tramp . . ."

"What you mean, honey?" one of the boys asked.

"You figure it out, Mister. Ain't it pretty late for little boys to be up?"

That was the beginning. Folks in Cypress City began talking about Eddie and the girl, Lola. Jeff heard about the talk but he never said a word. Not until the carnival had been playing five days and Eddie himself brought up the subject. It was at supper time. Zinnia, the portly cook who was in charge of the house because there hadn't been a woman in the family since Mrs. Ashley's death years before, served the grits and biscuits.

"Look, Pop," Eddie said, "how long are you figurin' to keep the lid on that dancin' show?"

Jeff buttered a biscuit with meticulous care. Then he looked across the table at the fine, big, twenty-two-year-old man who was his son. He said, "Why, Eddie, I don't rightly know. It all depends."

"On what, Pop?"

"On what kind of a show they got. And maybe if I was to give permission, they'd sort of quit bein' educational an' instructive an' maybe get just a wee mite vulgar."

"So you won't ease up on 'em?"

"No, son, I reckon not. Tell Lola I'm sorry, but that's how it is."

The boy's face was flushed. He said sharply, "You don't like me runnin' around with the girl, do you?"

"Did I say so?"

"No-o. But . . ."

"S'long's you watch your step, Eddie, I guess it's all right. Trouble with a kid like you is you sometimes get the idea you're grown up before you really are. Twenty-two knows a heap of things, but not enough. And I figure every man's got to git over a few Lolas befo' he can settle down like he should."

Eddie started to say something, then shut his lips on the words. Jeff could do that to him: make him feel mad and helpless at the same time. The old man never preached. He said things you didn't want to hear, but you couldn't get sore because they were so dog-gone true.

Eddie had the feeling that Jeff worried about him a lot. Well, he hated the idea of anybody worrying about him. Made him feel like a kid and here he was a man grown; the tallest, strongest, fastest feller in Cypress City. That seemed to impress everybody else, but not Jeff. He always had the feeling Jeff might say at any time, "Now, son, you run on up-

stairs an' wash behind your ears."

Eddie finished his supper in resentful silence. Then he got up and said, " 'Night, Pop," and went out. He walked downtown and into the Elite Billiard Parlor where the gang hailed him loudly. He unracked a cue, chalked the tip, and announced himself in the next Kelly game. His friends looked at each other and shook their heads.

One said, "Snap out of it, Eddie. We ain't done nothin' to you."

They kidded him along and told him what a great guy he was, and eventually he felt less deflated. One of the young men said, "You know, Eddie, you got more guts than anybody I ever saw."

This was music to young Mr. Ashley's ears. He smiled and said, "Where you get that stuff?"

"I was thinking of Lola. She's crazy about you, and that guy Harvey—Slug Harvey—is sore as hell. He claims she's his girl."

"So what?" Eddie rested the butt of his cue on the floor. "Am I supposed to curl up and die because a worn-out pug gets mad at me?"

"He's tough, Eddie."

Eddie Ashley said, "Look, you guys. If that Slug Harvey ever says a word to me about Lola I'll lay him like a carpet."

They greeted the bombastic statement with great enthusiasm. Somebody said, "I bet you could, too," and Eddie answered with supreme confidence, "Sure, I could."

He felt big and powerful and all-conquering. He looked down at the admiring faces of his friends, and an idea clicked in his brain. Something of his father's sense of humor showed behind his eyes, and he started to laugh. He said, "Boy! What an idea!"

"You thought of somethin', Eddie?"

"And how I have!" He sat on the edge of the pool table and they gathered close. "Look, this Slug Harvey thinks he can scare anybody with those cauliflower ears of his. Maybe Lola thinks I'm afraid of him. So how would it be if I made him give me fifty dollars and I used it to buy Lola a good time?"

Somebody whistled with admiration. "You mean you'd box four rounds with him?"

"You got the idea," said Eddie. "And in addition to that, I'll give him a trimming."

They let out a howl and spent the next ten minutes telling Eddie what a lad he was. He was feeling swell; he wondered why he hadn't thought of this before. Everybody in the Elite knew what was being planned and some of them rushed out to spread the news. One of the boys said, "You ain't scared of him, Eddie?"

"Don't make me laugh. I'm bigger and younger and stronger,

and I know how to handle myself. I'll lick him easy."

They went to the carnival in a group. They stopped by the hooch tent and Lola came out. She said, "I been hearing things, Eddie."

"You been hearin' right, honey. We can use that fifty fo' a little fun."

She said, "He's no bum."

"I'm not, either. How about comin' over to watch the fight?"

She spoke to the concession manager and he said all right, she could go on account of business was lousy anyway, thanks to that hick chief.

By the time they reached the Monster Athletic Carnival tent, it was jammed. The word had spread. The wiry little manager came out, and Slug Harvey walked up. It all looked very dramatic to the home folks.

The manager said, "I dunno about lettin' you do this."

"Why not? Scared Harvey'll get hurt?"

"No-o. I'm scared you will. Your old man is chief of police here."

Eddie grinned. He said, "Listen, Pop ain't *that* kind of a guy. What I do is my business, and if things are run fair and square, he won't squawk."

The local boys all endorsed this; and the eyes of Slug Harvey narrowed into tiny slits. "Let him fight," he said to the manager. "He's asking for it."

They escorted Eddie to the room in the rear of the main tent. It was a dingy, smelly place. There was an iron washstand and an army cot. Slug Harvey slept there, and now he sat on the edge of the bed and stared at Eddie with his cruel little eyes.

He saw a fine strong boy who stripped beautifully; long, rippling muscles, big hands, clear eyes. He glanced at himself in the cracked mirror over the washstand. His own face was badly scarred, the nose was flat, the ears out of shape. He understood why Lola preferred this kid, but the realization didn't make him love the kid. He thought, *I'll chop him up to look like me!* He wasn't even doubtful. He knew the difference between professional and amateur fighters.

The manager was making his announcement to the tense throng in the main tent. He displayed five ten-dollar bills which he ostentatiously placed in the hands of a spectator to be given to Eddie Ashley if he was still on his feet at the end of the fourth round. Then he summoned the two men.

The contrast between them was startling. Eddie was young and handsome, Slug Harvey squat and ugly. Eddie was twenty pounds heavier. He was smiling at his friends, and if he felt the slightest apprehension, he didn't show it. Slug Harvey merely stood motionless, gimlet eyes focussed on the floor. Once he raised those

eyes and looked at Lola in the audience, saw her wave at Eddie and smile. The muscles in Harvey's shoulders—the hitting muscles—twitched.

Gloves were laced on, five-ounce fighting gloves. They were called to the center of the ring, and given instructions ". . . straight Marquis of Queensberry rules . . . protect at all times . . ." Then the bell clanged, the spectators hushed, and the "exhibition of the noble and manly art of self-defense" was on.

They came close and Eddie swung. It was a powerful, inexpert, roundhouse swing. Slug picked it off and sank a short right to the ribs. Eddie contorted with pain and tried to cover. Harvey stepped in, brought his left up to the jaw and looped his right to Eddie's mouth.

Then Slug Harvey backed away and spat contemptuously. He knew all he needed to know. Young as Eddie was, and as strong and courageous, he was no match for any veteran professional. Slug Harvey had him. He knew he could drop Eddie in the first round, but his little eyes picked out Lola in the audience and he decided to wait.

What happened after that wasn't pretty. It was an exhibition, all right; the exhibition of a smart, trained fighter chopping a brave, untrained youngster to pieces; cruelly and scientifically, knowing that Eddie wouldn't quit, knowing he'd take a beating.

The crowd yelled for Eddie, but it was no use. You can't hurt a man if you can't hit him, and such punches as Eddie landed were on Slug's shoulders and arms and chest. By the end of the first round Eddie was a mess. He spoke through mashed and bleeding lips, "I'll surely get him the next round."

"But Eddie . . ."

"Listen, I never quit in my life and I ain't aimin' to start now."

What followed was pretty bad. Slug Harvey shuffled around the helpless and bewildered lad, stunning him with rights and lefts to the face. He taunted Eddie . . . "Not such a big man now, are you, Sonny . . . Maybe you won't try to act grownup after this . . . There's one for me . . . and one for Lola . . . I'll make you quit all right . . ."

There were a few in the audience who didn't like Eddie. He had been too picturesque a figure in Cypress City not to have enemies. They started yelling "Ouch!" in chorus every time Harvey landed. It became a steady beat—"Ouch! *Ouch!* Ouch! *Ouch!*" Like that. Someone yelled for the manager to stop it, and the manager explained why he couldn't.

"S'pose I did, folks? Then everybody would say it was crooked, that I stopped the bout to save my fifty dollars. Sure, I want the

kid to quit, but he's gotta do it himself."

And Eddie wouldn't. He stood there and took his beating. There was a red haze in front of his eyes and a thousand agonies in his beaten body. The flat, bruised, ugly face of Slug Harvey seemed twice its normal size and his husky voice penetrated through the pain and dizziness, taunting, jeering, sneering.

It was awful to be fighting a man you hated, and feel so helpless. Eddie could hear the crowd laughing and cheering. Then things were all jumbled up, but he clung to the thought that he must take it for the full four rounds. He'd never quit—never! Nothing else seemed to matter now.

He didn't quit. Neither did he survive the four rounds. Midway the fourth round Slug Harvey measured the kid with his left, then stepped in with a murderous right hook to the side of his jaw. Eddie went down hard, and stayed there. The manager whispered to Slug, "Gosh! I hope you ain't killed him."

They stretched Eddie out on the cot in Harvey's sleeping quarters and did things to him. He was a mass of bruises and a welter of pain, but he was all right.

Lola came into the tent while they worked over Eddie. She sat down beside Eddie and directed their efforts. She knew what to do and she was gentle and fine about it. Just having her there did something for Eddie, made him feel almost as though he'd won. She said sweet things to him and he was just young enough to be glad that his friends could hear them.

Slug Harvey shuffled over and stood looking down at the cot and at the top of Lola's red head. He said to Eddie, "That'll learn you to stay in your own back yard, Boy Scout."

Lola said, "Get outa here, willya, Slug, before somethin' happens."

Slug laughed into the young faces of Eddie Ashley's friends. "They won't gang *me.*" The young men surged forward in answer to the challenge, but Eddie struggled up to a sitting position and stopped them. He said, "Lay off him, fellers. This is unfinished business, but it's between Slug Harvey and me."

Eddie's head was spinning, and he wanted to go home. Lola said, "Get yourself fixed up, Eddie, and come back later. I want to see you."

Eddie's friends looked at each other and at Lola. They were country kids and not too sure of what was going on. But they still thought Lola was quite a girl.

Eddie went home and did what he could to his bruised features. Jeff walked in on him. He said, "I heard all about it, Son."

"Well?"

"Nothing. I just came in to

see if you were hurt bad or just bruised."

"Bruised. I been in fights befo'."

Jeff moved to the door. He said, " 'Night, Son."

" 'Night, Pop."

An hour later Jeff heard his son tiptoe downstairs and let himself out of the front door. He lay there, staring up into the darkness. He wasn't sure that he liked what had happened that night, but maybe this thing might teach the boy a lesson.

"I sho' been missin' Mom since she died," Jeff thought unhappily. " 'Tain't easy fo' a father to influence a son bigger'n him." He turned over on his side. "He's a good boy, Eddie is. But, my gosh, he's crazy . . ."

Jeff Ashley went to sleep. He was a healthy man and he slept soundly. He didn't wake until Zinnia shook him next morning and told him that Slim Watson, one of his men on the Cypress City police force, wanted to see him right away.

Slim came in and shut the door. He looked grim. He said, "There's hell to pay, Jeff."

"How come?"

Slim moistened his lips. "Slug Harvey was murdered last night!"

Jeff's bare feet hit the floor. He began slipping into his clothes and asking questions at the same time. "How, Slim?"

"Stabbed. Found him lyin' on his cot back of the main tent at that athaletic show."

Jeff ordered Slim back to the carnival grounds. He waited until the front door closed, then walked down the hall to Eddie's room. He opened the door and went inside.

Eddie wasn't there.

A quick glance told Jeff that Eddie's bed hadn't been slept in. Jeff walked out of the house and started down Main Street.

There were quite a few natives clustered about the Athletic Carnival tent. The coroner was there and the county sheriff had come, too, to see whether he could be of any help to Jeff, who was only the chief of police of the town. Jeff said he'd handle it. He went inside and joined the coroner and the carnival folks who were there, and it didn't take more than a glance to show him that Slug Harvey had been murdered.

Jeff knew that everybody was looking at him as he poked around the place for evidence, which he didn't find. Finally he started out of the tent. Sheriff Williams joined him outside.

"Need any help, Jeff?"

"No thanks." Ashley met the sheriff's eyes levelly. He jerked his head toward the crowd. "They all thinkin' my boy did it, Jim?" Jeff asked.

"Uh-huh. They're bound to." Williams lighted his pipe. "Where is the boy, Jeff?"

Jeff shook his head. "I don't

know," he confessed. "I looked in his room befo' comin' down here. He was gone." He stood silent for a moment, then said, "Eddie couldn't have stabbed nobody, Sheriff. He's wild as a buck rabbit, sure, but it ain't in him to kill a man when he's sleepin'."

Williams nodded. "I agree, Jeff. But after what happened last night, folks are bound to think things." The sheriff clapped his friend on the shoulder. "I'll be around. Let me know if I can help." He walked away.

Jeff moved down the midway until he found Peter Grayson. The pudgy owner of the carnival was worried and nervous. Jeff started asking questions.

"Got any idea when it happened, Grayson?"

"No, Chief, nobody has. I asked all my people. They don't know anything. Didn't hear anything. Just found him thataway this morning."

"Did he have any enemies with the show?"

"No-o, not that I know of. I'm comin' clean, honest I am, Chief. I reckon there was some didn't like him, but I wouldn't say he had enemies." Grayson mopped his forehead with a solid silk handkerchief. "This is likely to ruin me."

Jeff Ashley kept his voice casual. "How's about sending for that girl, Lola?"

"Ain't you heard?" Grayson seemed surprised. "Lola has disappeared."

That hit Jeff hard. But he kept his voice quiet. "What do you mean, disappeared?"

"I mean just that. Everybody looked for her after they found Slug's body. She's gone. Didn't even sleep at the hooch tent last night."

Lola gone. Eddie gone. Slug murdered . . . Jeff was thinking, "Watch yo' step . . . watch yo' step. . . ." over and over and over again. But his voice was steady as he said, "Was she really Slug Harvey's girl?"

Grayson shrugged. "Sure, why not?"

"Exclusive?"

"Aw, Chief, you know what dames like that are like. Lola wasn't anybody's exclusive property."

"She ever play around with any other men in the show?"

"I suppose so."

"Who, for instance?"

Beads of perspiration stood out on Grayson's forehead. "I know what you're drivin' at, Chief, but you're wrong. A dame like that, travellin' with a carnival . . . Hell, I reckon I could name a dozen. Mike Travis, who rides in the motordrome, him and her sort of hit it off pretty good. Frankie Grimes, who runs one of the wheels. George Pike, who barks for the freaks . . . They're just names to you, Chief. I could go on. Lola sort of played the field. But Slug

Harvey, he was her steady one."

"Was he a jealous man?"

"We-e-ell, yes, sort of. Always figurin' Lola was givin' him the runaround, which she was. But there wasn't ever any trouble because the other guys was scared of him."

"Who," insisted Jeff, "would you put second on her list?"

"That ain't a fair question. It's anybody's guess."

"All right, make it yours."

"I couldn't say. Mike Travis, maybe. Or Frankie Grimes. She liked 'em both pretty good." Grayson wet his lips, said, "Now, look, Chief, there ain't any sense following that line. This thing wasn't done by anybody in my show. It was somebody outside; somebody livin' in Cypress City."

"Like my son, for instance?"

"Hey, wait a minute! I didn't say that, Chief. Now take it easy . . ."

"I ain't sore, Grayson. It's natural everybody should think Eddie did it. But I think different. Maybe because I'm his old man. Maybe because I don't believe he's built that way. Maybe because I'm afraid to think otherwise. I'm being fair with you. You be just as fair with me."

The carnival proprietor looked at the lean, sinewy chief with admiration and sympathy. He said, "I'm sorry as hell, Chief, honest, I am."

Jeff Ashley conversed briefly with a half dozen of the men who were supposed to have been brief moments in Lola's liberal life. Some—like Frankie Grimes—were sharp and resentful; some, like Mike Travis, surly and uncommunicative. All of them asked him, directly or indirectly, why he didn't do a bit of investigating closer to home.

Jeff went back to his cottage. Zinnia insisted that he drink a cup of coffee. She'd been hearing things, too, and she was worried. But she didn't ask questions. Just left Jeff sitting on the porch in the wicker chair, with his feet on the railing, smoking and thinking.

He went over it again and again. It always added up the same way. Everybody believed Eddie was guilty. And when he told 'em that the boy was gone, as he'd have to do pretty soon . . .

Zinnia cast a black shadow over him, and her deep voice said quietly, "Feelin' pretty low, ain't you, Mistuh Jeff?"

"Yes, Zinnia, I certainly am."

"Folks is sayin' turrible things 'bout Mistuh Eddie."

"I know what they're saying." He turned to look up into her anxious face. "You raised Eddie, Zinnia. He couldn't kill a man, could he?"

"Nawsuh, he sho' coul'n't. Not Mistuh Eddie. But wimmin, they send a man cl'ar out of his haid sometimes."

For two desperate days Jeff hung on, hoping against hope that he'd hear of, or from, Eddie. Then

he swore out a warrant for Eddie's arrest on suspicion of murder. Folks stopped him on the street after that news got out, tried to be sympathetic, and succeeded only in making things worse.

Nobody went to the Carnival any more. Grayson got permission from Jeff to move on to Vreeland which was at the other end of the county. He promised to keep in touch. So the Great Amalgamated Shows rolled out of town.

They were talking about Jeff all over Cypress City. They said he looked like an old man, all of a sudden, and it wasn't any wonder. They said—some of the less charitable ones—that they always knew Eddie would come to a bad end, running around wild like that.

Zinnia worried about Jeff. He wasn't eating, and she knew that he wasn't sleeping. "'Taint a night I don't see a light in his room 'til all hours, an' him jes' a-walking up an' down . . ." she told the neighbors.

Yes, he walked up and down. Thinking in circles. Hearing the church chimes strike off the night hours. Trying to figure a way out.

Then, one night he heard the front door open. And he knew it was Eddie. He'd have known it by the hammering of his pulse even if he hadn't recognized the step. He stood in the middle of the floor, waiting.

Jeff didn't know his son at first. It was a shock, the change that had come over the boy. It wasn't all a physical change although he showed it there too. It was something more. It was in the eyes mostly. And in Eddie's manner.

He'd been so big and strong and cocky, always swaggering and strutting. Now, just standing still, you got the feeling he'd never swagger or strut again. He was taller than Jeff and broader, but looking eye to eye at that minute, he was just a kid again. A kid in trouble who had come to his father for help.

Jeff's voice was quiet and steady. He said, "Come on in, Son. Sit down."

Eddie sat on the bed and Jeff pulled up a chair. He asked, "Hungry?"

"No thanks, Pop."

"Feel like talkin'?"

"Yes. That's what I came home for." The boyish face twitched. "I couldn't stand it any more."

"You couldn't stand what, Son?"

"Hiding out."

"That's always bad."

Eddie looked across at his father. He said, "Is it true, Pop, that folks think I killed Slug Harvey?"

"Yes, Son, they think so."

"Do you?"

"Co'se I don't. But there's a lot of things I don't know. How come you left Cypress City so sudden, for instance?"

Eddie said, "That part of it seems pretty silly now, Pop. I was crazy about that girl, Lola. I felt bad about that fight at the carnival, when Slug made such a fool of me. It seemed like they'd always be laughing at me here. So—" He paused.

"Go on, Son."

"Lola asked me to come back after the show and see her. I did. About two o'clock that night."

"Where did you meet her?"

"Way up past the end of the midway. She said she hated Slug for what he'd done. She said she was crazy about me. She said how about us running away together."

"To get married?"

"That's what I thought." His cheeks were flushed, but his voice didn't falter. "After we got where we were goin', she said she didn't want any marriage. It didn't seem so bad to me, Pop, then. I never was fooled about what sort of a girl she was, but I was crazy about her."

"So you-all stayed together. And then . . . ?"

"I felt pretty big. And I didn't know what had happened back here. Not a thing."

"When did you find out?" Jeff asked his son.

"About five days ago. Lola came to me with a newspaper clipping. Just a little item in the Capital City Press. It told about a warrant being out for me for killing Slug Harvey. I wanted to come right back, but she said that sure would be a crazy thing to do."

"Why?"

"She said I'd be convicted sure. You see, Pop, even Lola thought I'd killed him."

"Seems like ev'ybody is figurin' thataway, Son."

"She said she loved me a heap, but she was scared to stick with me any longer. She said maybe they'd pick me up, then they'd think she had something to do with it, too. She told me to hide out, that nobody knew where I was and I could change my name and all, and then I'd be safe. Then she left me. After she was gone, I got to thinking things over. I didn't know what to do. So I came back here, to talk to you."

"Got any idea who killed Slug Harvey, Eddie," he said quietly.

"No."

"And Lola thinks you did it?"

"Yes."

Jeff asked, "Have you heard from Lola since she left you?"

"No. I haven't any idea where she is."

Jeff looked into his son's eyes. He said, "I have."

"Where?"

"She's back with the carnival, Son. She's been back for three days."

Eddie looked surprised. After a moment he said, "Well, maybe that's natural."

"Uh-huh. In a way." Jeff Ashley chose his next words carefully. "I got a hunch she ain't so crazy about you, Eddie."

The boy looked up. "What makes you say that?"

"I been getting reports from Vreeland, where the carnival is playin' now." He looked at a spot on the faded carpet. "Did you happen to meet a guy named Frankie Grimes, one of the concessionaires?"

Eddie nodded. "Sure, I met him. Why?"

"Nothin'," replied Jeff. "Nothin' at all, Son—except that since Lola rejoined the carnival, she and this Frankie Grimes have teamed up."

Eddie's tall frame uncoiled. He rose and stood there, straight and angry. Jeff Ashley rose, too, and dropped his hand on Eddie's arm. He said quietly, "Keep yo' shirt on, Son. There's no sense gettin' all steamed up like that."

Frankie Grimes was short and wiry, with a shrewd little face. He was a tense man with snapping black eyes and hair worn slicked tight against his head.

It was seven o'clock in the evening, the supper hour in Vreeland, and the midway was deserted. Frankie drifted back into the living quarters behind his raffle wheel concession. He grinned at the redheaded girl who was fixing supper. He said, "Hi, Beautiful," and she walked over and kissed him and said, "Hello, darling."

"How's for some chow, Lola?"

"All ready." She slid two platters on the table and seated herself. They smiled at each other. He asked, "How you doin'?"

"Fine," she said. "I'm doin' fine, Frankie."

Neither had heard the movement out front. Lola was the first to discover that they were not alone. As she stared with startled eyes across Frankie's shoulder he turned, then started to get up.

Eddie Ashley said quietly, "You'd better keep on sittin', Frankie."

Eddie didn't look boyish at that moment.

Lola's voice was shrill. She said, "Now listen, Eddie—"

"I ain't listenin', Lola. I'm talkin'."

"It ain't what you think, Eddie. Honest, it ain't."

"No? Well, I think it, just the same. That's why I'm here."

Frankie Grimes swallowed, then asked, "Why?"

Eddie shifted his stare from Lola to the little man. He said, "You keep out of this, Frankie. I ain't aimin' to harm you. I've come to square things with Lola."

"Frankie!" She was getting hysterical. "You ain't gonna let him—"

"Keep quiet. I got it all figured out. . . . They've got me dead to rights for a killing I didn't do. So it doesn't matter a damn if they tack on another that I'm fixing to do."

She looked scared. The crazy yokel kid didn't look like a kid now, nor act like one. He meant

business, she knew it. There wasn't any uncertainty in those eyes of his. He was quiet. He was a man, now. He was dangerous. And Lola was thoroughly frightened.

She said, "Frankie, he's crazy! He ain't foolin'!"

Frankie's shrewd eyes had narrowed. He was concerned exclusively with Frankie Grimes. He knew danger when he saw it, and he was seeing it now. He said, "I'm out of this, Lola. It's you and him."

Her eyes revealed panic. Then, as she stared incredulously at Frankie her panic turned to anger. And then she said some things which were all very profane.

Eddie Ashley just stood there and listened. Finally he stopped her. "That don't get you anywhere, Lola."

He took one step toward her. She screamed, "It ain't me you want, Eddie! It ain't me!"

He asked quietly, "What do you mean?"

"You're fixin' to kill me because you think you've got a murder rap hangin' over you anyway so you ain't got anything to lose. Well, it ain't true! They ain't got nothin' on you!"

Frankie Grimes got up. Eddie's muscular hand caught him by the arm and he said, "Sit down, Frankie. You done said you're out of this." He faced the girl again. "You better talk fast, Lola."

"Frankie Grimes killed him," she cried hysterically. "Frankie's been crazy about me for a long time but he was scared to play around, because he was afraid of Slug. That night, after you and Slug had your fight, he killed Slug. He figured everybody would think it was you, and he'd have Slug out of the way and then he could get me."

Eddie asked, "And you knew he did it all the time?"

"Yes. I'm talkin' straight now, Eddie. You gotta believe me. I knew it was Frankie, but I liked him and I hated Slug. Frankie said the thing for me to do was to get you out of town, stick with you a while, then get you started on the lam. Then I could join him again. So I did. And I been with him since I left you."

Two men walked into the room then. One of them gaunt, grim Jeff Ashley. The other was the Chief of the Vreeland police force. Jeff said, "You heard her, Tom?"

"Yeah," said the Vreeland chief. "I'm arrestin' 'em both."

He took Lola and Frankie away, and the father and son were left looking at one another. Eddie met his father's eyes, then suddenly sat down, said, "I'm all in, Pop."

Jeff Ashley put his hand on the boy's head.

"I was scared, lettin' you handle it yourself, Eddie. But you done good. I'm mighty proud of you."

"Thanks, Pop," he said humbly. "And from now on I aim to keep you feelin' that way."

# me and mickey mouse

*by . . . Steve Fisher*

**A child-star is kidnapped, her mother murdered—to bring panic to a major Hollywood studio.**

ROGER DUNN RUBBED the cold cream into his palms and smeared it on his face, leaning forward and looking into the mirror—looking at himself and yet past himself, past the bare walls and into the future. But like the room, this stock actor's dressing-room that anybody could use when he was working, he saw nothing in it. The future was as barren as the walls around him and he was a solitary figure walking into a gloomy mist.

This was the end. Today would be the end. His fake laughter, his fake smile, his phoney slap on the back and "Hello, Joe"—all of these he would lose. He would become a shadow like so many other Hollywood shadows, and if they asked him how he was doing he was going to say:

"I'm washed up, that's how I am. I never did much. That is, I never did much in pictures although since I was a kid four years old I was eating my heart out to be an actor. I was on the stage and they thought I was pretty good.

"They thought I did a fair Hamlet. They had begun to men-

*The most important single factor in any story is emotion—for unless the reader's feelings are stirred the most colorful backgrounds and plots are just so much dead weight. Steve Fisher, whose* I WAKE UP SCREAMING *is still a classic novel of backstage crime, is a master at rousing a reader's sensibilities, as he proves in this hard-hitting mystery tale about Hollywood.*


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tion my name—Roger Dunn—along with Katharine Cornell and Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne. That was why I was imported to Hollywood—but I was never used. The play they brought me out to do was given to Barrymore finally, and then they got another script ready for me and at the last minute decided they'd better use Clark Gable."

He sat rubbing the make-up from his face, thinking that he would tell them that, if they really wanted to know why he was a has-been at twenty-eight. But of course no one would be interested. Yesterdays never interested Hollywood—it was tomorrows they worshipped, and tomorrow he would be through.

He smiled thinly, and dipped his face into a basin of water and then began to wipe himself with a towel. When he was seated again he lit a cigarette and opened a drawer, glancing toward the door, then at the window and then bringing out a bottle of bonded whiskey.

He unscrewed the top and poured himself a drink. He downed it fast and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. Then he got to his feet. He began to walk up and down. If he didn't do something he was going to go nuts.

He decided to pretend that someone *did* want to know why he was where he was, up against the gray wall of defeat. He would pretend that someone wanted to know why his agent had just called up and said, "I want to see you, Dunn, here in the office. Just as soon as you're through work."

"What is it?" he had said. "Spit it out, Abe. Don't act like I'm a woman who's a widow but doesn't know it yet."

Abe's voice had been cold. "It's better that we talk here in my office. The news is—well—ah . . ."

"Bad—is it bad, Abe? Are they sick of seeing my face?"

He waited but without hope.

"It isn't very good news. That's all I can say. Please don't press me, Dunn."

"No," Roger had said. "I won't press you, old man!" Then he had hung up, knowing that if Abe had anything even remotely hopeful to tell about his sad news he would have come over to the studio to tell it.

So, thinking now, he decided he would pretend that someone wanted to know *why* this circumstance had come about—*why* the brilliant Mr. Roger Dunn, two years ago of Broadway, had seen this coming, yet was crushed by its arrival. He walked up and down in the room, reviewing the whole thing, saying lines without saying them out loud.

"After that Gable incident," he went on, "it was one thing after another, postponements and stalls and my option ran out but

was renewed. I don't know why they kept thinking they were going to do *something* with me. Then because I had a lot of time on my hands, because I didn't know what to do and because I was proud of my five-year-old daughter, I brought her to the studio.

"You've heard of her, of course. You all know *that* story. She was a natural in pictures. The kid made a million dollars in the first year. They have Marie Dunn dolls and powders and baby-soap. No nursery is complete without a Marie Dunn crib, no baby warm without a Marie Dunn comforter wrapped about her precious hide. Even a comic strip in the papers.

"That's swell, isn't it? That's wonderful. That's the height of parental bliss. That's the supreme happiness. Or is it? They say when she was signed up he balked and raved and tore his hair and had all kinds of reasons for keeping a child out of that kind of life because it might spoil her. But mostly because it kept the child from being normal and more than anything he wanted his little girl to be a normal little girl, going to a regular school with other ordinary little boys and girls.

"You might have heard about that? How his wife—Marie Dunn's mother—at once saw the magnificent opportunity to develop her daughter's talent, to bring out the finer qualities in her. Her mother saw this—or was it a lot of money she saw?—and put her foot down and insisted that Marie sign up.

"And that the studio changed Roger Dunn's name to Roger Watkins and put him on a stock actors' list at a hundred and fifty a week. Stock actors, you know—waiters, one-scene butlers, flash scene drunks singing to a lamppost.

"But whatever else happened it was certain that Roger Dunn, father of Marie Dunn, could never get very big because then Winchell or Fidler would discover his identity and what would the public say? The public would say he had used his daughter to promote himself.

"So Roger Dunn went along trying to kid himself that he was an actor of sorts. But all the time I've been waiting for the ax to fall. Now your daughter is making plenty of money and—this is just a suggestion, you understand, but don't you think it would be well if you—ah—retired to the sidelines?

"Remember Mickey Mouse? Remember the tremendous possibilities he had? But then what happened? Disney played a lousy trick on Mickey and brought forth a new offspring and now it's Donald Duck you hear about. So that's it and now the knife has come and I'm out—or I will be out as soon as I get over to see Abe. I won't even be able to go

back to New York. Marie has me licked there too. But I should be the happiest man in the world that my little daughter has so nobly endeared herself to the hearts of the public.

"Of course, this endearment cost me my wife, because she at once became a financial wizard, a hawk hovering over a gold mine. Our home turned into a kindergarten in the mornings and a tea shop in the afternoons and a place for mad parties at night. It wasn't big enough either. We had to move to Beverly Hills—eighteen bedrooms and a swimming pool. And when Marie needed a week's rest she and mother flew to Reno to rest there, although it turned out to be six weeks and she came back and told me I didn't live there any more but that I would be allowed to see Marie every Sunday between four and five o'clock.

"The payoff came when 'Marie' made a monthly settlement on me. That monthly settlement is about all that's in the bank for her under her name, even though she doesn't know it. My ex-wife doesn't save anything, doesn't try to. Depressions are caused by people who save too much. Why should she worry? She has Marie's stardom all figured out year by year.

"So there you are. I'm out. I'm even going to be washed up as a stock actor in another hour. Marie Dunn and Donald Duck are the ones. Me and Mickey Mouse are out."

Dunn stopped his silent speech and looked around him. For a moment it had been as though he were on the stage, wrapped in a part and delivering an oration that the critics would go home and write pretty adjectives about. And he felt suddenly tired.

He dropped down in front of the mirror, looking at the circles under his eyes. Mechanically, as he stared into his own pale face, he poured another drink. And just as mechanically drank it down.

II

He couldn't sit there forever. In one way or another the world must keep moving. He had foreseen all this, hadn't he? He had been waiting for it and now he wasn't going to lose his nerve and start spilling a lot of tears of self-pity. Hell no!

But it was tough, plenty tough, and Roger wasn't going to pretend that it wasn't. He went to the door of the dressing-room and turned the knob but before going out he took another drink. He was beginning to feel the drinks now. Not only in his stomach and through his chest but up in his head too. He opened the door and went out, conscious that his feet were heavier than they should have been.

Roger walked along the studio walk, the bottle still in his hand.

He had done this so many times —walked on this walk, seeing the same things. The sound stages—the big fake sets—the people hurrying back and forth. And without meaning to, he came to sound stage sixty.

It was closed but he saw the guard sitting out in front of it and he said, "Is Marie working?"

"Yes, Mr. Dunn."

He felt self-conscious talking to this guard. He must have known. Probably everyone knew. He was a has-been. His chief claim to fame, at twenty-eight, was that he had a child.

"I—ah—I wonder if I could go in?"

"We have our orders, Mr. Dunn," said the guard.

"To hell with orders. I want to go in."

The guard got up. He looked hostile but Roger met his eyes and the guard said "I'll go in and ask Mr. White if—"

"Yeah, you do that," said Roger. Then, when the guard had opened the door and gone inside he climbed to the platform and slipped through after him and drifted into the wings, along the backdrops. The guard came back, went outside. He would probably decide Roger had given up the notion and gone on.

But Roger stood here for a moment, in the darkness, breathing and distening. All of the familiar sounds came to his ears. *"All right . . . we're ready for the take* . . . Mrs. Dunn, if you'll place Marie there on the box. Mr. Jones, is Marie's sweater right? Fine, fine. Lights now. Right wing arc. Now left. Now full . . . *Grips!* Where is the grips? Ah, there you are . . .

"You at the camera. Have you got her in focus? Can you see her? How does she look? . . . She does, does she? Marie will you please smile now? That's it! That's fine. Do you mind moving back out of the scene, Mrs. Dunn? . . . Thank you. I think we're ready . . . Places everybody! Roll them, Howard! *Action."*

Roger stood listening, hearing Marie say in a full rich voice, "And the night was filled with sweet-cakes and music," then hearing the orchestra and Marie's voice as she sang, as her tiny feet moved in rhythmic tapping. He had thought he was alone and because he was absorbed in what he heard and what he was thinking he was not conscious of the girl who moved out of the shadows toward him. When he saw her she was right beside him.

*"Kathrine!"* he whispered. The orchestra was loud, the mikes wouldn't pick up a whisper.

She touched his hand so that he felt a flush in his cheeks. In a moment he was kissing her though he didn't know why. She didn't mean that much to him. She was a stock actress, a nobody like himself, although a swell kid.

She had beauty and talent and bad breaks. It was she who had stuck by him when his wife divorced him. They had met at night too, to go to shows, to wander hand-in-hand up Hollywood Boulevard. She was slim and had rich red hair. But her skin, her beauty, was like a flame that licked in radiance from the smoky blue of her gown. She was wearing a gown in this picture.

"Roger," she was saying now, "what's the matter? You look sick."

"I am sick, Kathrine," he said.

She took both of his hands, her eyes pleading. "What we've got to do is get away from Hollywood. This life is killing you."

"But acting is my only life," he said hopelessly.

"There *can* be more than that." Her tone was impassioned. "Oh, darling, there can and there must be more. Don't you see?"

He was going to answer when he suddenly grew rigid with sound that hammered into his ears. The music had stopped. Marie's singing had stopped. The director was bawling. "Who in the hell is back there talking?"

Roger whispered, "You stay here," and leaving Kathrine he emerged. He stood in the giant floodlights with everyone looking at him.

Then little Marie's voice broke and she said, "Daddy . . . !"

He didn't care then. He went to her and put his arms around her. She was saying, "Did you come to watch me work, Daddy?"

"That's right, sweet," he said.

Then Sara broke in. Sara, his ex-wife, with her bleached hair and her grimly rouged face. "This is quite, *quite* uncalled for, Roger. This cheap display of dramatics in the middle of one of Marie's scenes. I do think you could have used more judgment!"

Roger whirled, meaning to tell her to shut up, but he didn't. He just looked at her, stared into her shallow face, and then he walked on past her. Everyone was talking at once now. Obviously Mr. Dunn was dead drunk. Marie's make-up was ruined. Didn't the fool know it took time to put on make-up?

Well, that was a good way to burn up a half an hour of the studio's time, all right. Will someone show Mr. Dunn the way out? All of this he heard as though it was all blended into one giant voice, and then through it Marie calling, "Daddy, Daddy! Don't let them send you out again!"

But he did let them, he didn't have much choice. Four of the grips got hold of him as though he were a confirmed alcoholic and was endangering people's lives. The studio would never forgive him for this. He was thrown outside. He moved off down the studio walk.

He was alone again now, and the bottle was still in his hand. He went around behind a building and drank some more of the

whiskey. He kept remembering Marie's voice when she said, "Daddy . . . !"

He sat there drinking, and then he got up. "I'll see her if I want. They can't stop me from doing that!"

He went around to her big dressing-room, where he knew he would find her relaxing for the renewal of the scene. He arrived at the door lettered *Marie Dunn* and stood there for a moment. Then he turned the knob and went in.

From the first moment he felt something queer about the emptiness of the room. Even before he knew there was anything wrong. Then he was walking, moving across the carpet. Sara was lying behind a big chair. Her body looked soft and made a half-crescent as though she had cuddled up to go to sleep.

But there was a gash in her head as big as a man's fist and blood had flowed from it in a big heavy mass that covered her face and matted her peroxided hair. A heavy cold cream jar was lying just beyond her head. The blow had been struck with this and had cracked the jar though not breaking it. Sara must have died instantly.

Roger Dunn stood over her corpse for a moment, feeling no emotion, neither grief nor joy nor even surprise. Then he looked up and around him in the empty room. He saw the note in front of Marie's mirror. It was lying against it. He crossed quickly and picked it up but his hands trembled. It wasn't for him to open. This was murder and he must leave everything alone.

Yet he knew that this piece of paper he held in his hand was a ransom note. He knew Marie had been kidnapped.

## III

Tony Key's office was on the fourth floor of a building on Hollywood Boulevard. It was a sumptuous office, known to the general public as the office of a moving picture agent because studio executives deem it wisest to not let it be known that Mr. Key was employed by a pool of producers to squash adverse publicity on all studio crimes from murder down. The salary he gets for this makes him the world's highest-paid detective.

He was pacing back and forth, garbed in a neatly tailored black suit, wearing beneath the jacket a white turtle-neck sweater. He always wore white shoes.

Betty Gale came in from the outer office, looking excited. "Tony, guess what?"

He said, "You guess, honey. I'm in no mood for games."

"Okay," said she, "you asked for it. Here comes an ax right between your eyes—Miss Marie Dunn, age seven, star of—"

"Skip it," he snapped, "what happened to her?"

"Kidnapped—her mother murdered. It happened ten minutes ago. I just took the call. The producer was so excited he couldn't even wait for you to come on the wire."

Tony reached for his gun, put it in a hip holster.

Betty went on, "You won't need the pea-shooter. This is no mystery. Roger Dunn took it from his wife and the kid as long as he could, then he went to town. They nabbed him right on the spot after he bumped his ex-wife. All they want us to do is to rush over there with our own picked Los Angeles detectives and keep the publicity out of the papers. They're hawking two of Marie's pictures around the country and they don't want the B.O. wrecked by bad publicity."

"I should think a kidnapping . . ." Tony started to say, sitting down and picking up a telephone.

"I expected that from you, my brilliant Adonis," Betty said. "But tie murder with that. Sordid, isn't it? It would kill the kid's pix deader than a mackerel."

Tony Key, on the telephone, arched his left eyebrow, said, "You've got something there, sweetheart. Just what I'm not sure." Into the phone he said, "Homicide office? This is Tony Key. I want Lieutenant Mick Ryan—right away . . . What? Oh, I want to play a game of backgammon with him. Yeah. You tell him that, will you? If you want any information you can get it from him afterward." He hung up, looked at the phone and added, "Maybe you can."

Betty was at the door. "You know what puzzles me, Tony," she said, "is how, if they've already nabbed Roger Dunn and he did the dirty work, they can say Marie is still kidnapped. Sounds screwy."

There was a crowd in Marie Dunn's dressing room but no cops, not one official. Max White, a director, stood shouting himself red-faced. An extra who had once been a doctor's assistant was bending over the corpse although he had no business doing it. James Turner, a huge red-haired carpenter who must have had a cousin who was a cop, was grilling Roger Dunn. Tony Key stood on the outskirts for a moment watching this horrible mess and feeling a rising hatred for the whole morbid crowd.

"Come on, punk," James Turner was saying, "what'd you do with the kid? Don't give us some of that baloney about you don't know or I'm going to let you have one."

"I tell you, I—" Roger Dunn began.

"Shut up and tell us the truth," Turner roared.

Tony Key moved forward, brushing people aside, said in a quiet voice, "That'll be enough of

that, Mr. Turner. And will the rest of you please clear out? I've had a little experience at this business and I'm taking charge until the police arrive."

He glanced down at the extra who was examining Sara Dunn's body. "If you don't mind, fella, the coroner will probably save you the trouble of getting your hands bloody. Besides, I understand there's a law about people monkeying around corpses."

"Go on," said Betty, "you heard Tony. Clear out, everybody."

The mob needed only a leader and now it had one. Mumbling, one after the other, its members headed for the door. The bald-headed director, Max White, still stood around, however, as did the extra who had been examining the corpse, also red-haired James Turner, who stood against a wall quietly watching.

Thomas Thurmas, the studio's executive producer, came in then, behind him Kathrine Lewis, who went at once to Roger Dunn and stayed with him.

Thurmas, who was big and had bushy black hair, said, "Well, isn't this some mess, Tony?"

Betty Gale flipped, "Don't bother him, he's reading the ransom note."

James Turner grunted, "Why read it when Roger Dunn wrote it and he's standing right here?"

Tony Key's white face showed no emotion but his eyebrows flicked upward. "Shut up," he said. Then he went on reading the note. It was printed in ink and from the smudges on it looked as though it had been quickly penned. It read—

*Let's have no foolishness about this. No newspaper headlines, no waiting. I mean business. I have neither the patience nor the cunning of a gang kidnapper. This is my first crime so I'm nervous and I really mean business. Unless forty thousand dollars in small bills is delivered to the outskirts of the studio Indian Village, at the horse trough, within an hour after this note is discovered, Marie Dunn will be killed. Any tricks and she will be murdered anyway. Despatch one person and one person only to contact me with the money and she will be delivered safely.*

Tony Key looked up, his green eyes flickering. "Mr. Thurmas," he said, "you're the big man here. You always have an immense payroll for the extra talent who get paid every night. You must have forty thousand here—and in small bills too."

"You mean we're going to pay it?" Thurmas cried.

"Exactly," Tony told him.

"But you're employed to see that—"

"Ah now, Mr. Thurmas," Betty Gale cut in, "nothing out of school. That's a secret, or isn't it? Anyway, if you did hire him

you must have thought him capable. So don't start asking questions now."

"Why, young lady, I'll—" Thurmas looked ready to explode.

"Tut, tut," said Tony Key. "Get the forty thousand and let's have no more talk."

"Marie Dunn isn't worth that to us!" Thurmas snapped.

Roger Dunn leapt across the room, his face livid. "Why you fat miserable punk! I'll—not *worth* it! She's—"

Tony grasped Roger Dunn by the arm in a jiu jitsu hold. He whirled him about, twisting his wrist, and sent him to the floor howling with pain.

"Another crack like that and I put handcuffs on you. I'm giving you a break as it is." He turned. "Get the money now, Thurmas, or I walk out on the whole case. I'm getting sick of this interference."

"I'll get it," Thurmas mumbled, "I'll get it." He went out, swearing under his breath.

Tony Key lit a cigarette. "Get out your book, Betty, we're going to town on this tribe." She drew out a notebook, flipped it back, poised her pencil. Tony looked at the large red-haired Turner. "You're a carpenter here, aren't you?"

"That's what they pay me for," the man answered. His face was broad, his eyes a slate grey.

Tony mused, "James Turner, studio carpenter." Then he said, "Just what gave you the notion that you had a right to grill anybody? You were grilling Mr. Dunn when I came in."

"I—"

"Never mind," Tony added. "Just one more question for you, fella. *When* did you put on that pair of overalls you are now wearing?"

"I—ah—I'm on the afternoon shift," Turner said.

"The overalls were clean when you came to work then. Fine. Just a question. You look pretty crummy."

"Why I—I . . ."

"Oh, no blood, no paint, no real filth, just crummy," Tony went on. "That's all. Your absence will be appreciated."

Betty looked up with a wooden smile on her pretty face. "Goodbye, Mr. Turner," she invited.

James Turner looked around, then stomped out.

Tony looked up at Max White, the bald-headed director. "What were you doing about the time Mrs. Dunn was dying and Marie was kidnapped?"

"I don't think, under the circumstances," the director said, "that is necessary to answer. I can prove where I was and what I was doing. Roger Dunn here—"

"Never mind Roger Dunn, I'll come to him."

"Right," said Betty Gale, not looking up from her book. "Just concentrate on yourself, Mr.

White. Who pulled out your tie and tore your shirt?"

"I get in a frenzy when I direct and—"

"I think that'll do for you too, White," Tony Key said. "We understand about the frenzy—maybe. Anyway that'll be all for now. I think the door is on your immediate left. Do you mind going out through it?"

As White walked out Homicide Detective Mick Ryan walked in. The coroner and a uniformed cop were on his heels. Ryan said, "Hello, Tony, what have we here?"

The coroner went straight to the body and bent over it. The extra who had been looking at the body and whom Tony had not yet questioned was still in the room, bending over the coroner, watching him avidly.

Tony Key explained the setup to Mick Ryan and showed him the ransom note. It was then that the coroner put down his instrument and got up, his face white with rage.

"Who has been fooling with the body? And where is the instrument with which this woman was struck and killed? I would say personally it was a sledge-hammer from the looks of her head. But . . ." He gazed around accusingly.

The extra who had been watching the coroner suddenly began to move backward. His jaw worked but no words came out of his mouth. Then suddenly he went rigid. A large bloody cold-cream jar dropped out from under his sweater and landed on the floor with a thud.

## IV

He was a little man, the extra. Little but all muscle, like a miniature wrestler. He had a bony face and brown eyes that were like spots of some amber drink spilled on an ash-white cloth that was his skin. No one said anything. They just looked at him.

The extra was both funny and pathetic. He stood, not daring to look down, trembling, sweating as though he were waiting for a firing squad to open up on him. Then all at once he began to talk. The speech was at first a broken jargon but it gradually smoothed out so that parts of it were comprehensible.

"My name is Johnny Jones . . . Just happened to be working in Marie Dunn pix . . . Heard about this and—and came over. Once was in a hospital unit in the Navy. Thought I could tell something about the corpse . . . I don't know what dropped out of my sweater but whatever it was I didn't put it there. I didn't know anything about it."

He was silent for a moment then, as no one spoke, went on, slightly hysterical, "I *didn't* do it, I tell you! Why do you all stare at me like that? I'm Johnny Jones,

just an extra, and I never hurt anybody. I—"

"*Nuts!*" Mick Ryan ejaculated suddenly. The detective was a bantamweight with a red Irish face and grey hair. "Nuts, I say. You talk that like you rehearsed it, Johnny Jones. You're under arrest." He moved forward.

"Wait a minute," Tony Key broke in. He arched his right eyebrow, glanced at Roger Dunn and Kathrine Lewis, who stood by his side, then back at Johnny Jones. "Let him go, Mick. Let him scram."

"What do you mean?" Mick Ryan bellowed, whirling about. "It's against all police ethics. It's not kosher."

"Let him go," Tony repeated evenly, quietly. "I've got a reason."

Mick Ryan bit his lower lip, snarled at Johnny Jones. "You heard him. Go on! *Get out!*"

When the smallish extra had gone Ryan said, "Well, Tony, you may be the highest paid detective in the game but at this point I wouldn't say you were the smartest. The guy has the murder instrument hidden under his sweater and . . ."

Tony Key smiled thinly. "There would be no point in his picking it up if he *was* the killer. Not unless it had his prints on it. And if Johnny Jones' prints are on it, it will prove that he is the killer and that he *did* pick it up. But the way I shape things I don't think you'll find his prints on that jar. And even so, even if it turns out I'm wrong and he *is* guilty, we still don't know where Marie Dunn has been hidden—and locking up the killer at this point might be just like signing her death warrant."

Mick Ryan thought about that for a moment, grunted, "I catch."

The coroner picked up the cold-cream jar, looked it over, then wrapped it up to take it back to Headquarters for microscopic examination. "No doubt," he said, "this is the thing that did it. She was conked by somebody that had the punch of a bull. Or can you gentlemen see that?" He nodded all around and left the room.

Mick Ryan looked after him with his back to the others. Both Tony Key and Betty Gale turned and concentrated on Roger Dunn. The actor fumbled with a cigarette, put it between his lips, started to light it, then dropped it.

"Oh, for God's sake, if this is an investigation, why don't you *do* something?" he said. "My daughter is—is—why don't you find her? Sara is dead. Getting her killer isn't going to help little Marie!"

Tony said, "Take it easy, fella. I want your story—everything you did this afternoon leading up to the murder. I've been saving you till last because frankly you're the chief suspect and—well, I have an

open mind. I hope you can clear yourself."

Roger Dunn looked around, picked up the cigarette he had dropped and managed to light it. In a voice that was choked with emotion he recited all that had happened, how his agent had called him, how he had been drinking and gone to Marie's set, how he had come in here to find Sara dead and Marie gone.

Betty said right away, "You didn't get so drunk that you're forgetting anything?"

"No," Roger Dunn said. "No, I wasn't really drunk. I was sick. I was feeling down, so the whiskey did nothing for me."

Tony's green eyes had been concentrated on the floor. Now they rose. "And you, Miss Lewis," he said, addressing the red-haired girl who wore the long blue gown, "Miss Kathrine Lewis. Did I understand from Roger's story that you two have—ah . . ."

She flushed. "We have found companionship in one another if that's what you mean. I'm sure Roger is innocent. Can't you leave him alone?"

Tony answered, "Sure," and took her hand, patting it. There was something about her wistfulness, the desperate sincerity of her love, that he could not help but admire. "Sure, and if things turn out right—I mean, if you're both clear, I hope you find a lot of happiness together." He kept holding her hand, squeezing it.

Betty said, "Don't take him seriously, honey. If he can lock Roger Dunn up he'll be around wanting to pay your rent."

Kathrine tossed her head and withdrew her hand. She glanced at Betty. "You should know more about that than me."

Tony Key turned, a flush on his face. "We're leaving the dressing-room, Betty. You can stay and play kitty-kitty with Kathrine if you want—what I meant was that *I'm* leaving." He looked over at Mick Ryan. "See you later, bantam. Hold tight and don't make any arrests."

Tony moved out into the studio street, glad for the fresh air that bathed his lungs. It was dark now and lights were gleaming everywhere. A soft mist, not a rain but heavier than a fog, had begun to drift from the sky. Betty came up beside him.

"What now?"

"A little incidental business," said Tony, "an idea I had. Then I've got to collar Thomas Thurmas and get that ransom money from him so I can keep that rendezvous."

"You aren't actually going to the Indian Village with all that dough, Tony?"

"Sure."

"Alone?"

"Sure."

"But—"

"Listen, sweetheart," he said, "I don't intend to pay it. I intend to clean the whole thing up. But I

had to pop off in front of Thurmas like I did, just as though I was willing to pay, because the kidnapper—who is also a killer—was right in the room with us then." He paused. "I had to let the snatcher know everything was going the way he wanted it. See?"

Her mouth dropped. "How did you know he was in the room?"

"You wouldn't understand," Tony told her, flicking his left eyebrow, "I arrived at the conclusion by using my eyes and observing an assortment of various little things referred to in a usual crime case as clues."

They walked along quietly for a moment, their faces damp in the moist air. At last Betty spoke. "According to character—if I have any after associating with you for the past two years—I should crack back with something smart. Like—which came first, the chicken or the egg—ah, I mean the clue or the crime. But I'm not going to."

"Thank you, Betty," he said. "Thank you very much."

"I'm serious," said she. "Honest to Pete, I'm serious, Tony. Now and then I get that way. I will say that you can observe more, find out more in a few minutes on the scene of a crime than—"

"Than you can. That's what you mean, isn't it? You want an explanation. You want to know who the killer is. Well, I'm not sure yet. All I've got is a lead and some ideas. All I know is how to proceed with the rest of the case."

He was nervous, under tension as he always was in the middle of an investigation, yet he was glad to have beside him the girl who had long ago become more than a secretary. There was something comforting about Betty, something warm in spite of her cold platinum hair.

They went into another dressing-room, one near both sound stage sixty, where Marie Dunn had been working, and the dressing-room from which she had apparently been kidnapped. Tony looked around, went out. Betty was still with him.

"There's Johnny Jones," she was saying, "that muscular little extra. There's Tom Thurmas, the producer, but you surely don't suspect him . . . There's Max White, the director with the bald dome, and of course Roger Dunn himself and that gal of his, Kathrine." She followed him into another room, a small wardrobe office which was now empty. "Tony, tell me, will you, whom do you—"

But she stopped there. Tony was leaning over a desk, picking up a blotter. He held it to the light, his green eyes flickering, and murmured, *"Ah!"* Then he looked around at the floor, stooping. He picked up a cigarette butt. It was tinged with a pinkish color and a dark blue, both of which were smudged. He dropped

this into his pocket and concentrated again on the blotter. It too was smudged with large blotches of ink.

"The ransom note was written here. The noose is getting tighter." He put the blotter in his pocket and lit a cigarette.

V

Betty Gale stood there, gaping. And then she said, "Sherlock Holmes was dim-witted compared to you. And don't say Doctor Watson was clever compared to *me* or I quit right now and go back playing stock for Paramet. What I want to know is how you could go along looking in various rooms and compartments and just walk in on a couple of nifty clues? You get a lot of dough for being smart, but this is beginning to sound like a dream."

"Look, my cherub," said Tony, "it was easy. I like to hear you say I'm smart but I'm just an ordinary guy who's had a lot of swell breaks. It wasn't much to figure out the ransom note was written here. From the way it looked, all smudged up, and in ink, I could tell it was done in a hurry.

"Someone in the studio wrote it, had to do it quickly before he was walked in on. Obviously he had to write it in a place near Marie's dressing-room. So there you are. And whoever wrote it wasn't so dumb either. Blotters seldom mean much. If you were in a rush they wouldn't mean anything.

"And that cigarette on the floor was a popular brand. Nobody could trace that. But I *did* want to find out where the note was written, hoping for something like this. So I just looked around in the most likely place."

She said, "Okay. I'll never pretend to know anything again."

They left the place, went back out on the studio street. Ahead of them an outdoor night scene was in progress and heavy flood-lamps poured down on boxes and pilings that were supposed to represent a pier. Vaguely they could hear the sound of voices and finally the clack of wooden scissors as a camera went into action. They turned in at Marie Dunn's dressing-room.

Mick Ryan was sitting by the corpse, smoking a pipe, and the uniformed cop was pacing back and forth. Ryan said, "A guy by the name of Thomas Thurmas called and said you should come to his office. What is he, a big shot or something that he can't come to see you?"

"No," Tony murmured, "he's small potatoes. He just owns about twenty-five-million dollars' worth of stock in this studio, that's all."

Betty was already on her way out and Tony Key followed her. They moved along a boardwalk toward the executive offices, both of them silent. Just before they stopped in front of Thurmas' door

Betty broke it. "I don't like it, you going out there to make contact with the kidnapper."

Tony Key didn't answer, just turned the knob and opened the door, motioning her in. They were standing on a rich black rug facing Thurmas, who sat with his fat body squashed into a swivel chair behind a mahogany desk. An armed studio guard stood near him, a black satchel at his feet.

"I'm sorry for what I said earlier," Thurmas said and Tony could see small beads of perspiration rolling down his fat cheeks. "You'd better go out and pay off the kidnapper and get Marie before something happens to her." He wheezed, added, "If anything *did* happen it would be lousy publicity for the studio."

"That's what you're thinking of, isn't it?" said Tony.

"Well, I don't like to see anything happen to the kid either."

Betty flounced down in a chair and folded her hands in her lap, waiting. Tony Key glanced at the satchel, back at the producer. "You can dump all that dough—that forty thousand out on the floor and cover it up with something. Betty's going to stay here with you and you can keep that guard to see nothing happens to the money."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm taking an *empty* satchel," Tony said evenly. "My only reason for giving you the instructions I did was to throw off the guilty party, make him think there was real dough coming. But you producers pay me a lot for doing a good job and I wouldn't risk your forty thousand for the world, Mr. Thurmas. I'm going out there and I hope to bring back both Marie and the killer."

"But you're taking a chance!"

"Maybe."

"I mean on *her* life, not yours—Marie Dunn's life."

Tony Key smiled thinly. "That's my responsibility. That's what I'm hired for—to take responsibilities like that. We've got a nice mob lined up—that carpenter, that red-haired fellow James Turner, that extra Johnny Jones, your director Max White, Kathrine Lewis and Roger Dunn. If it's any of them I think I can handle the situation all right. The only thing on which I possibly miss is if you yourself are guilty!"

Thomas Thurmas rose to his feet, shaking with rage. *"Me* guilty! What motive would I have for—why would a man in *my* position try to—"

Tony held up his hand. "Never mind. Just dump out the money and give me the empty satchel."

Thurmas sat down, still sweating and looking weak. He motioned for the guard to obey Key. Tony waited, then took the satchel and headed for the door. Betty Gale rose silently, blocking him. For a moment Tony stopped, catching her under the elbow and

looking down into her pretty upturned face.

There was something in the intensity of her grey eyes that made him feel a pulse-beat in his throat. He squeezed her arm, said softly, "I'll see you later, honey." Then he was gone, out through the door, the empty satchel in his right hand. He was moving down the boardwalk.

It was quite a distance to the lot where the Indian Village was set up. But he went along with an even step, feeling the night air in his lungs and the heavy mist on his face, seeing ahead of him as he reached the outskirts of studio buildings the swirls of fog-like grey that rose from the Culver hills.

He felt his footsteps crunching in the soft hard-wet dirt. He became suddenly aware that he was counting his steps, that there were all kinds of thoughts in his mind, thoughts of past cases, thoughts of the future and always—always that *maybe*. Maybe *this time* I won't come out alive. *Maybe* . . .

There was always that risk, that element of chance, that he might die and Hollywood would go on without him, with another highest paid detective. Betty Gale would again be wearing tights and kicking her legs for a musical at Paramet and all the swell people he had known would mention him once in awhile and say, "Too bad about old Tony, wasn't it?"

He thought of these things and then he tried to get them from his mind, tried to focus on the present, on his mission, his reason, his motive. Always he either led a killer into a trap or, as was the case this time, let the killer lead him into the killer's trap. This latter, going into the killer's trap, was always more dangerous, for you were moving into his ground, playing your guesswork against his knowledge.

He was walking between the tents in the Indian Village. It was like a miniature town, empty and deserted. Empty as the satchel he held in his hand. The ghosts of red-painted actors walked these streets with him. The echo of clicking cameras of the silent days was in his ears, the thunder of horses hoofs, horses long gone, the galloping steeds of Tom Mix and William Farnum and William S. Hart and Harry Carey. They formed a ghostly escort for Tony Key as he walked along.

He arrived at the horse trough, put down the satchel and leaned against the rusted and waterless tank. Though he appeared to relax against it he was tense, every muscle keyed to singing pitch. His hand moved back to the hip holster—and he waited.

He knew the kidnapper would never let whoever had brought the money out to him go back alive. He knew the game. He was aware that the criminal could take no chances on possible future witnesses since he had already mur-

dered once. This killer had already tasted blood. He would come to shoot Tony and to take the money. He would release Marie Dunn and she would find her own way back.

Tony waited, knowing this, feeling it instinctively from his knowledge of criminals and his experience with them. He waited in the thick of the starless night, knowing it was too dark for him to be a good target. The killer would come up to him as though he was going to take the money and then he would let him have it.

He heard a frightened cry. He peered anxiously, holding his gun down at his side so that it could be seen at once. Then he saw Marie emerge from the shadows. The little girl's face was a terrified white, her eyes were like big black quarters.

"The man who kidnapped me," she said in a trembling voice, "said that you should give me the money and that I should bring it to him." She recited this like a line from a picture. "He says if you try anything smart he can easily shoot me from where he is and shoot you too. He says you must give me the money and then wait here another five minutes."

Tony whispered, *"Can* he, darling? Can he shoot us from where *he is?"*

"No," she whispered quickly. "He's back in one of those tents, waiting."

Tony lifted Marie Dunn, put her in the waterless horse trough, said, "Stay there—stay down." Then he plunged forward. But the killer had not remained in the tent. For as Tony moved forward bullets rang out.

The staccato whang of the shells roared through the silence, cut a jagged raw-red streak. Tony Key clutched his left arm, was whirled about by the impact of the slug. Then before he realized what was happening, he was falling face-down into the mud. He bit at the mud, jerked his body around, lifted his gun and fired blindly.

The killer came out of the brush like a charging animal. He was on Tony while Tony was still in a sitting position. Running, the man from the shadows kicked Tony on the side of the head, then stopped beyond him, whirled about and brought his gun level. On his hands and knees, his own gun in the dirt, Tony Key turned to see, through the blood that dripped down past his eyes, the muzzle of the killer's automatic pointed straight at his forehead.

## VI

There was a moment, a fraction of a second that was eternity, while he waited for the slug to come and split his head wide open; when he waited for the death he knew he faced. There was that and then the instinctive rise to meet the emergency. No fear, for there's no fear while something is

happening. Fear is only in waiting for or looking back on something.

He had no conscious plan. His mind telegraphed orders to his body and the next he knew he was rolling—rolling from the hands-and-knees position in which he had been. The shots came simultaneously but his rolling motion changed his position and the bullets missed him. Tony rolled over against the killer's legs and then he was reaching up, clawing for the gun.

He grabbed the gun wrist and as he did this he forced his body upward. He braced his legs and drove himself to rise, so that it brought great pressure suddenly to bear. The killer reeled backward, unable for the moment to use his gun because Tony had hold of his wrist.

It was Tony, rising with all the strength that was in him to bring himself erect, and the killer being pushed backward. It was all happening in half-seconds, the killer going backward, bending back on his heels—now tripping, stumbling backward, sagging. And it was Tony Key coming down again—coming down on top this time.

There was a moment when Tony was forcing the killer to the earth, when victory seemed sweet and certain. But in forcing him down he lost his grip on the killer's gun and while he was falling to the earth with him an explosion rocked between them with the shuddering eruption of a volcano.

After that Tony Key's muscles stopped working, everything collapsed within him and he was sliding off to the ground. He twitched there, fighting to retain consciousness, and retaining it—hearing the footsteps of the frightened killer retreating until they no longer sounded hollowly in his ears.

Then Tony, his side bursting with blood was rising. It was only a scratch—the bullet had gone on through. He was rising, his gun still in his hand, blood beginning to cake on his face where he had been kicked, his left arm hanging limp where it had been shot. He stood there with the night swirling around him, saying, "Marie—Marie Dunn."

"I'm here," came her voice, "I'm still here. He didn't see me. He just picked up the satchel and ran away."

Tony Key smiled then, his green eyes warm. He turned toward her. "Everything is—all right then."

Tony Key came into Marie Dunn's dressing-room all bandaged up, with his left arm in a sling and his side patched and a cloth neatly tied about his head. Betty Gale propped him from one side, and little Marie Dunn from the other. He came in and sat down.

"You should be in the hospital," said Betty.

"There'll be time for that later," Tony said, "and I've already got my nurse picked out. Right now we have to finish our work, don't we?"

He looked around the room. Bantam Mick Ryan of Homicide stood there beside his uniformed sidekick, waiting. Both of them had their guns out and handcuffs dangled.

The corpse of Sara Dunn had been removed but the room was grimly quiet in spite of the number of people who were in it—Thomas Thurmas, the fat sweating producer in the biggest and most comfortable chair—baldheaded Max White, the director, his shirt still torn, his eyes gleaming—extra Johnny Jones, muscular and small and frightened—carpenter James Turner, with his red hair, wearing white overalls and looking big and unpleasant. And of course Roger Dunn and Kathrine Lewis.

Tony Key saw them all, looked at them all. Betty Gale was opening her notebook.

"The glove," said Tony.

Betty lifted a soiled and bloody white glove from her lap and threw it on the table.

"That was found in the Indian Village after the mixup I had there with the killer," he said. "Marie Dunn was blindfolded until she was released to contact me and cannot satisfactorily identify her kidnapper. The glove is court evidence. It is from a pair drawn today from the studio workshop. These gloves are numbered and the workmen who draw them must sign for them." He looked directly at the large carpenter James Turner. "That establishes the guilt against you quite sufficiently."

The large red-haired man leapt to his feet. "It's a dirty lie and you know it! You can't put *that* over!"

"Are you denying you drew those gloves today?"

"I drew *a* pair of gloves—yes!" Turner bellowed.

"Then—"

"It's a frame-up, I—"

Tony leapt to his feet. "You *what?*"

James Turner was gulping. "I tell you, I didn't wear them. I . . ."

"You mean you *didn't wear them when you went to the Indian Village!*"

"That's it, I—"

"But you *did* go to the Indian Village?"

"I—ah . . ."

Tony said, "You *did,* didn't you?"

"I didn't wear the gloves there."

"But you *did* go?"

"Well, I—yes, I went. But I didn't wear those gloves."

Ryan and the cop leapt forward and put handcuffs on Turner. He kept raving but they held him between them. Tony Key sank back down in his chair.

"I was certain of his guilt," he continued as soon as James Tur-

ner had subsided, "but I had no evidence. When the cops are sure of somebody they don't mind inventing evidence and convicting with it. I merely invented it to get his admission, through a denial that he had worn the gloves, that he had been to the Indian Village. Nothing infuriates a criminal more than to have a lie told about him. He figures the truth is bad enough. A lie gets him dizzy. It's not a new trick but you all heard him say he was there. The way I did it was to take one of his gloves and bloody it up. The gloves were in his locker."

White with rage James Turner was staring at him.

"The actual evidence against him which convinced me of his guilt," Tony Key went on, "was too slight to present in court. It was the appearance of grease on his overalls. The overalls he had *just put on,* fresh and clean. The position of the spots, their color, the number of these grease-spots, convinced me he got them from handling the cold cream jar with which Mrs. Sara Dunn was killed.

"The impact of the blow proved it was done by a man. These points, along with others—the lack of motive, Turner's low-pay job as a carpenter making him a not unlikely kidnapping suspect and so forth, hung the noose around his neck in the first few moments after I interviewed him as far as I was concerned."

"Remember, Mr. Turner," Betty Gale said, looking up. "He told you you were crummy. He tipped you off right then."

"Never mind," said Tony. "We have other business. We come now to the motive which wasn't just money. The blotter and cigarette, Betty."

She lifted these items from his pocket and put them on the table.

Tony went on, "Miss Kathrine Lewis, in love with Roger Dunn, wanting to go away with him, maybe to the other end of the world somewhere, but lacking the funds—and bitter about Sara Dunn and his child. Kathrine Lewis knew Roger Dunn would never do anything about his predicament, so she planned to have Marie Dunn kidnapped.

"Obviously she couldn't do the job alone. She knew James Turner, made the proposition, laid out the plan. They would split. With twenty thousand she and Roger could go away, she figured. Of course Roger Dunn knew nothing about these plans. James Turner, working only for money, would get the other twenty grand for doing the dirty work."

Kathrine Lewis rose, her face flushed with anger, and then she sank down in a chair and began to cry. Roger Dunn sat staring straight at Tony Key.

"Miss Lewis had no murder scheduled in this kidnapping. But James Turner evidently suddenly found himself in a position where he had to kill. Sara Dunn prob-

ably walked in on him. So he picked up the cold-cream jar and let her have it. He snatched little Marie then, left the note that Kathrine Lewis had printed and made off.

"My evidence against Kathrine Lewis is more concrete, although like most such evidence it is based on seemingly very simple things. It was these, however, that led me to the solution. When I took her hand in this room an hour and a half ago it was to look at it more closely. On it were faint spots of ink she had tried desperately to wash off.

"Remembering how spotty and smudged the kidnap note had been I looked around, found the blotter that had been used and a cigarette she had smoked while writing it. The cigarette had the pink of the rouge of her mouth on the end and blue spots of ink from her fingers on its sides. The blotter, however, handled in great haste, received a perfect fingerprint. This can be compared with her own print and I'm sure you will find it the same.

"Kathrine figured that since Marie Dunn had wrecked or all but wrecked Roger Dunn's career, the money from her kidnapping should be used for them to go away on. She probably reasoned that this was no more than right."

Mick Ryan moved toward the girl, started to take her wrists.

"Wait a minute," said Tony and he cast a glance at Thomas Thurmas. The fat producer was wiping sweat from his face with a handkerchief. "Kathrine wasn't on the scene of the murder, neither directed it or had anything to do with it. Since the kidnapping has not been announced outside of this studio the police officially have no authority. That is, they haven't even been told there was a kidnapping.

"They know there's a murder though, they have the corpse. They *have* to do something about that. But James Turner was in on the murder *alone*. Unless he wishes to involve Kathrine with him as an accomplice and thereby have himself charged with kidnapping as well as murder, I recommend that her part in this be ignored. That's a big request. But I think she's learned the full score and, well"—he shrugged—"it's no longer in my hands."

Kathrine leapt to her feet. "No," she said, "I'm a criminal and I'll take my punishment."

The fat Thomas Thurmas looked at Roger Dunn. "As Tony says, the kidnapping hasn't been announced, no mention of it will ever be made in the papers. It's studio business. We can press charges or not as we see fit. The murder is the affair of the police and my carpenter James Turner will have to swing for it. But Kathrine's part—the kidnapping—she thought she was doing it for you and I leave the verdict to you."

Roger Dunn's voice was hoarse. "I'd like to take her in custody," he said, "as my wife, as Marie's new mother."

## VII

Roger Dunn stopped his car in front of the building on Hollywood Boulevard and told Marie and Kathrine to wait for him. Then he entered the building and went up the stairs. Abe, his agent, had been waiting for him. Poor Abe knew nothing about what had happened and would never know. Tony Key's cases were like that.

Roger walked along the hall and stopped in front of Abe's door. He paused a moment. It was still going to be bad news.

He walked in now. The girl at the desk, working long overtime, gave him a dirty look and disappeared. She came back a moment later. "Abe will see you now."

He walked in. Abe was sitting at a big desk. "I expected you sooner," he said.

"I'm sorry, I—"

"It's all right." Abe raised his hand, let it fall again. "I haven't got anything very happy to tell you. I wanted to tell you personally, and alone. Like this. I thought it would be better than telling Sara. She'll go into hysterics when she hears. She'll try to pawn Marie off on quickies, she'll sell her down the lane to two-bit junk shops.

"I mean this, Roger—Marie is through as a child star. She's washed up, finished! Her last two pictures have been duds on the market. They're rushing her through another one but if things go on the way they are they'll have to shelve it. It came suddenly. She was a fad. They're coming back to the old favorites and you'll have to face it."

Roger could scarcely speak he was so filled with joy—but Abe misinterpreted his silence for grief.

"It's not going to be so bad," he went on, "if you can get her custody away from Sara and bring her up right. Sara won't be so interested now that she's not worth money and it shouldn't be so hard. You can be a good father, Roger.

"In a year Marie will be forgotten by the public and we're going to get you the kind of pictures you should have had at the beginning. Why, on the strength of this I've been able to raise your option to two hundred and fifty a week. Six months from now it'll be five hundred."

But Roger Dunn was not listening. He was saying in his mind, over and over, "The old favorites are coming back, the other was only temporary, only a fad. The real stars are Mickey Mouse and me. Yeah, me and Mickey Mouse."

# trail of the brown sedan

*by . . . MacKinlay Kantor*

**A cop in the old tradition was Officer Glennon. To him duty was a religion, a way of life.**

THE LAST RECORDED words of Sergeant Paul Van Wert, spoken about a minute and a half before he died, were directed at First-class Patrolman Nicholas Glennan, who opened the door for the three detectives and their manacled prisoner.

"Looks like more Indian summer," said Sergeant Van Wert.

"Another good day," nodded Nick Glennan, and pushed on the bronze crossbar that served as handle for the narrow panel. When you're convoying a tough guy like Rainy Moper out of a railroad station you don't use the revolving door. No, you use the regular door—Detective Johnson goes ahead, the tough guy follows along, locked tight to Detective Cohen's wrist. You, Sergeant Van Wert, bring up the rear. You nod to the cop on station duty and say something about the weather. He opens the door for you and you all go outside and get killed.

Said the NEWS-DETAIL, in its second extra published about an hour and fifteen minutes later:

*The three detectives were jubilant, for Rainy Moper, murderer, mail bandit and extortionist, had*

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*The famed author of* THE VOICE OF BUGLE ANN *and* THE BEST YEARS OF MY LIFE *has turned out some of the finest novels of recent times. A master of drawing characters that live and breathe, Mr. Kantor takes a casual every day situation, mixes it with average citizens, adds his love of humanity and the result is, as in this early crime story, a bit of life in the raw.*

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*fought a hard battle against extradition. Their arrival at the Union Terminal was unheralded. They stepped from the Pullman, brushed through the first crowds of office-bound commuters, and hustled their prisoner out of the station.*

Said the NEWS-DETAIL, in its special copyrighted story which went ticking over twenty wires:

*Officer Nicholas Glennan, hero of the raid which wiped out the American Packing Company payroll bandits last March, was on station duty. He spoke to his fellow officers, opened the door for them, then started back toward the lower station level.*

Said Antonio Bambasino, proprietor of the Union Terminal Smoke Shop: "I was just looking out the window when those men come out with him. They is a blue touring car parked close, with another man he sit at the wheel. One detective he get in front. Those two more start to get in back with the Rainy Moper fellow. Nobody say a word. Then the guns they start . . . "

Sister Mary Louis, Superior of St. Joseph's Mercy Hospital, was only twenty feet away, walking toward the station door. Accompanied by Sister Clementina, and having just emerged from a taxicab, Sister Mary Louis was not expecting to see the very quintessence of murder. She had level gray eyes, a firm chin, and her calm voice had only a slight tremble in it as she talked to the police.

"I noticed," she declared, "that a brown sedan was parked beside the blue touring car. Just as the group of officers got into the touring car, a man opened the door of the sedan. No, he had no mask. He held something in his hands; it must have been a machine gun. A man was shooting from the front seat, too. We heard the shots; we stood there, petrified, looking at those men. No one screamed. It happened suddenly. Then the brown car went forward across the low curb, turned past the lamp-post and raced up the street . . ."

Taxicab Operator Fred Cepak, license No. 1786, got a good look at the men in the brown car. "There was three. One driving, one in the front seat beside him, and one in the back. Two of them was big fleshy guys, and the one driving was a little dark runt. Naw, they weren't masked. And well dressed, kind of. The guy in back pulls up with a machine gun, but the fellow in front had an automatic in each hand. The shots go bang, bang, plunk, faster than I can say it, then the little guy says, 'Hell, you got *him!*' And with that they shag-tail outa there. The cops in the touring car are sliding down, dead and bloody. The sedan door came open just as the gunmen bounced off the curb. Then this cop comes out the station door and starts to shoot . . ."

They were good witnesses for the most part. Somehow they

seemed unusually methodical in telling what they saw. It was as if the blast of gunfire had robbed them of all hysteria. Eight o'clock on a bright Indian summer morning . . . there in front of the sober railroad station. They were mainly accurate in their statements.

Nick Glennan, with only thirty minutes left before he would be relieved by Officer Canaday, thought he'd see whether he had gained or lost any weight during the hours since he came on duty. He found a penny in his pants pocket and dropped it into the slot machine scales, there in the south corridor of the station.

Then the shooting began. . . . He had his gun out before he reached the street. As he opened the glass panel he could see Detective Johnson's wet, red face sliding lower and lower in the front seat of the police car. That was enough; it told a long story to Nick Glennan in just two-fifths of a second.

The brown sedan swished across the wide parking plaza, its left rear door jolted open, swaying, a wide gray arm reaching out and trying to pull the door shut. Glennan's revolver barked three times. Then, thinking that he had missed, he expended his remaining three bullets in the direction of the gas tank. A huge gray shape tumbled out across the running board of the swaying sedan. Slowly, painfully, it was trying to pull itself back inside as the car swerved around the corner into Comanche Street. Glennan had missed the gas tank, but one of his first three bullets had found a fleshy resting place.

He leaped to the bloody running board of the parked car. People were screaming all around him. Detective Johnson and Sullivan, the driver, had the blank stare of death frozen in their eyes. Out of the red-spattered rear seat came a faint sigh. It was Cohen; he died in the ambulance five minutes later.

Glennan snapped to the paralyzed taxi driver behind him: "Switch on. Back out! Switch her *on,* I tell you!" He ran to the lamp-post and wrenched open the green police call box. He jerked the receiver from its hook and said rapidly: "Glennan on Number Forty-three. Carload of hoods shot up Bureau car just now, at this corner. Ambulances, squads, Union Terminal. Brown sedan went south on Comanche Street. Stop all brown sedans at city limits! Medium-sized car—might be an Olds or Chrysler. I'm on my way . . ."

A traffic cop was sprinting from the Bailey Street intersection, and another from the east plaza. People screamed. Glennan fell into Fred Cepak's green taxicab. "Get going . . . down Comanche," he gasped. Through the open window he howled down to the nearest traffic cop: "Stay on it, Bert!"

and the cab went swaying toward the nearest corner with Officer Glennan reloading his gun in the back seat.

He snapped the cylinder home and leaned out the window of the cab. In front of the Alcazar Hotel a newsboy was out in the street. "That sedan—" yelled Glennan. "Which way?"

"Went south—south . . ."

There wasn't much traffic. The cab skidded around the left side of a southbound street car, narrowly missed a northbound car, and screeched down the tracks. There were people lining the curb. Somebody pointed, waved. Yes, they must have seen that fat gray shape on the sedan's side, slowly pulling its wounded self back to safety.

"Keep the horn going, buddy," said Glennan to Taxicab Operator Fred Cepak.

"Okay."

A block away from Paxton Boulevard they could see the traffic cop waving his arms. "Slow!" yelled Glennan. He leaned out and waved an answering hand.

The traffic cop's face was familiar but to save his life Nick couldn't recall his name.

"Brown sedan? Think it's a Chrysler. She just made a left turn, on the yellow. East on Paxton. What's—"

"They just rubbed out a whole carload from the Bureau," Glennan snapped. "Get over on the box for orders." But he was a hundred yards away as he said the last words and the cop could only stare after him with puffy eyes.

At the top of the hill, near the Episcopal Church, Nick could see the long length of the boulevard sluicing away toward the misty smoke of suburbs. Cars, glistening blotches, the wide band of concrete was dotted with their beetle shapes. Between dry lips Glennan muttered a curse. This would be the same old story. Lost in traffic. Give any car a minute's start and the driver had a good chance for a clean get-away. *I had to phone,* he kept hurling at himself, *I had to!* Block the highways . . . get the news on the radio . . . stop a brown sedan at the city limits . . . Yes, he had to phone . . .

And that extra minute or two that brought an ambulance which might mean life for Van Wert or Cohen. There had been that faint sigh from the shambles of the death car. An extra minute . . . an ambulance . . . *had to phone.*

"Keep going, bub," he said to the chauffeur.

They raced on. At each of the next three corners Glennan shrieked to pedestrians or men in front of their shops: "See a brown sedan? Speeding?"

The men pointed, called out . . . Yes, she went that way. She went north. Up that street. Yeh, going like hell . . .

With Fred Cepak and the green

cab Nick Glennan went hurtling up the cross street. North. A car, going like . . . He overtook it—a small roadster with three high school girls in it.

"Swing her back," he groaned wearily. "It's the same old story. We've lost it. The damn sedan's gone."

They drove back into Paxton Boulevard. Sirens were moving toward them from the east and from the west. Glennan jumped off the running board and held up his hand. A big black limousine let its brakes crunch, the tires burning brown ribbons on the concrete. Hard faces, hard eyes staring at him. "Brown Chrysler. Out this way. That's all we know . . . Make for Five Mile Corner, Al." They whistled away; someone was opening the rifle box and dealing out ammunition.

And so it went. There was a cordon around the whole town in less than ten minutes. The telephones jangled and squalled; teletype ribbons took up the story, and state police began to whine up and down the long open highway on their motorcycles. Brown sedan after brown sedan—farmers, school teachers, radio repairmen, dentists, Fuller Brush men—car after car they were overhauled and lined up, their hands above their heads. *What's your name? Where you been? Let's see your license. Keep 'em covered, Jack.* Car after car . . .

Detective Abraham Cohen died while the ambulance was still seven blocks away from General Hospital. As for Johnson and Van Wert and the driver, they were past any need for hospitalization.

And Mr. Rainy Moper, extortionist and five times a murderer, had gone to his own private brimstone pool with all speed. The women who had fainted were being revived in drug stores beside the station. Newspaper reporters, policemen, gabbing witnesses—a herd of them festered around the blue touring car with its shattered windshield and wet leather cushions.

Nobody was sure what mob had done it. It was hard to believe that any gang of hoodlums, however hopped and demoniac they might be, would blatantly kill four police officers in their eagerness to effect the demise of Rainy Moper.

Nick Glennan got back to the Union Terminal Plaza in time to find his brother, Detective Sergeant Dave Glennan, on the job. Fourteen other officers of various departments were with him.

Before Nick went away to report he took a walk across the street. He found something lying on the asphalt, near the corner of Comanche Street. It was at this point that the big man in the gray suit had sprawled out of the open door when Nick fired. Glennan picked up the object, looked at it dazedly, started to throw it away,

then thrust it into his pocket. Slowly he made his way through the packed crowd and into the wide, guarded circle.

"Four of the best guys who ever lived," his dry-eyed brother muttered to him.

Nick Glennan nodded, "Yes," he said dully.

They checked up, block by block and man by man. As the brown sedan passed the Alcazar Hotel, the big man who sprawled through the open door had managed to pull himself inside; a man in the front seat had reached back and slammed the door. The cop at Paxton and Comanche was positive in his identification. It must have been the same sedan, he declared—a shiny one with three men in it—which made a left turn into Paxton Boulevard. He blew his whistle at them.

If they'd made the turn on the red light he would have grabbed a car and gone after them, but it was getting on toward the rush hour for city-bound traffic and any driver is apt to make a mistake and turn on the yellow light instead of the green. Just a split second's difference. So the cop let them go.

But Paxton Boulevard is mainly a residential street, and in the shuttling stream of cars—in the absence of more cops—the runaway car had vanished. School kids: some said one thing and some said another. You couldn't be sure who was right. It seemed fairly certain that the gunmen had gone north into the new additions between Paxton Boulevard and the railroad. At least they hadn't passed Five Mile Corner.

Eight police cars went cruising through the new prairies, the flat sub-divisions. Marble-eyed men examined every alley and driveway and private garage. The human manacles around the main highways were drawn tighter and tighter . . . the teletype clicked and buzzed, phones were a screaming chorus.

First-class Patrolman Nick Glennan came slowly down the steps from police headquarters. "No," he told the clustering reporters, "they've got my story, inside. Go in and talk to the Inspector. You don't want to talk to a damn fool who missed because he was a poor shot."

"Listen, Glennan," said McCail of the *News-Detail* and Luff of the *Tribune*, "nobody's blaming you. You did every damn thing you could."

Nick shrugged. "That's all right, but I should've got them." He adjusted his peaked cap and went on down the steps.

In a gray Packard parked beside the curb were Sergeant Dave Glennan and Detectives Kerry and Horn.

Nick went over to the car. His corpulent brother was hunched deep in the rear seat with a feather pillow between his shoulders. Dave Glennan's back

was still sore after a famous shooting scrape in March.

"All washed up?" Dave asked kindly.

"Yes, I've just been talking to Inspector Bourse."

"You're off duty now?"

Nick blinked at him. "Yes."

"Want to take a ride?"

Nick climbed into the Packard beside his brother. "Let's go," said Dave. They went swiftly and silently up the Avenue.

The young patrolman turned his sad eyes to the huge sergeant. "Where you rolling?"

"I've got an At-Will assignment, but I keep in touch with the Bureau. If they need me they'll shoot it to us on the radio." He shoved the pillow higher between his shoulders. "Did you show the Inspector what you found?"

"Yes. He said it was nothing."

"That's what I say, boy. Nothing."

Kerry asked, "What did you be finding, Nick?"

The patrolman fished a small object out of his pocket and passed it across to Kerry and Horn. "A bottle opener," grunted Horn.

"Yes, it is that."

It was three or four inches long, a flat oval of silvered metal with a sharp tongue at one side and a long handle. HOFFBRAU LIGHT OR DARK—*Drink the best,* was stamped into the handle.

"You get 'em with a case of Hoffbrau beer," explained Horn. "Whenever you buy a case they give you a free bottle opener."

Dave Glennan nodded. "That's the trouble; that's the reason it ain't no clue. There's too many of them around."

"Where'd you find it?"

Nick said, "Out on the plaza. It was about where the car was when the big guy slipped out through the door."

"You thought he might have dropped it? . . . Dave, how many cars go by that station in a day?"

"Ten a minute, perhaps. Lots more in rush hours. I don't know. Your guess is as good as mine. The Inspector said to forget it, eh, Sparrow Cop?"

Nick turned bitter eyes on him. "I'm a sparrow cop no longer," he said softly. "Though I was on the park police last March when I grabbed those hoods who shot you, out there on Acola Street."

There was silence in the car for a moment. Dave flushed; awkwardly, he patted his kid brother's knee. "Suppose Inspector Bourse had told you to regard this bottle opener as a clue, Nick. How would you work it?"

Nick took a long breath. "The city flusher," he said, "cleans off that plaza at the Union Terminal every morning. It was there this morning, a bit late—five o'clock, it was. It shoots a most powerful stream of water. It would wash that bottle opener up to the curb like chaff. So the bottle opener

was dropped since five o'clock—"

"We're listening," said Dave.

"If a man dropped it from a moving car—or if it got jolted out of the side pocket of a moving car—it wouldn't roll far. It ain't the right shape. I picked it up ten feet from the curb, but to the north of the safety island. And the brown sedan crossed there, headed southeast, cutting across the wrong side of the plaza . . . You see? It was in a kind of no-traffic zone. If it fell from any other car it came from one traveling between the stanchion and the curb, because all traffic is supposed to move *outside* the stanchion."

Kerry said, "And those cars are few and far between. Maybe the big guy did drop it, Nick."

"Shut up," Dave said. "Would you call up the Hoffbrau Brewing Company by long distance and arrest them all, Nick?"

The radio began to crackle. Nick Glennan didn't answer. The grating voice said, "Squads Eight, Nine and Sixteen. Suspicious car reported on Pearl Street south of railroad tracks. Abandoned brown sedan. Signal Twenty-four B. Squads Eight, Nine and—"

"Here's Dorchester Avenue," Dave directed the driver. "Down Dorchester to the Paxton cut-off, then left." The balloon tires howled as the car swung quickly into Dorchester Avenue . . . forty, forty-five, fifty, fifty-five . . . the speedometer ribbon blurred. The siren sang in an endless alto. They flashed across a streetcar line in the face of halted traffic.

Kerry, not the liveliest-witted man in the squad, was mumbling to himself, "Signal Twenty-four B. Signal—"

"You dope," said Horn wearily, "that's 'As you approach the designated point watch for criminals fleeing from the scene.'"

"As if they weren't 'fled from the scene' an hour ago," grunted Sergeant Glennan. "I always did say that if you didn't have a license number you didn't have much to go on."

Nick grinned his tired grin. "When the day comes that they make it jail for the man who drives with muddy license plates we'll have a better break. There was dirt an inch thick on those plates. Nobody got a smell of them. You can't put teeth in an ordinance that carries a two-dollar penalty."

Vacant lots began to flicker past them.

"Pearl Street," meditated Dave. "That's a block or two past Washington. It's nothing but a big mudhole there, no houses or nothing. Turn right at the second corner, Frank."

Horn asked, "And no rise out of anybody at the Gallery?"

"No," said Nick. "We all looked and looked. The taxi driver and the nuns helped us. It wasn't anybody ever mugged in this town."

"I say they were trying to spring him," grunted Dave.

"And Moper handcuffed to Cohen?"

"I know the Chief and most of the others think it was a pushoff. But it wasn't worth it; if anybody'd wanted to rub out Rainy, they could have managed it easy with stabbing, after he went to the pen. They never needed to risk all this. No, they were primed to spring him. Maybe they didn't realize he was tied to Cohen. They got rattled, maybe. Remember what the taxi driver said about it? 'Hell, you got *him!*' That was no push-off."

They shouted and argued back and forth above the wailing sirens. The Packard skidded into the miserable pavement of Pearl Street. No houses here; the wasteland and marshes spread out, block after block. Rubbish piles, tilted signboards . . . Far ahead near the railroad viaduct a dark group of men milled around a huddle of cars. Dave leaned out and squinted his narrow eyes. "That's Rhineheimer's squad. Eight. They got here ahead of us."

Anna Watelowitz and Irene Krzanowski were the best witnesses who had yet figured in the case. They had been playing games—playing house, mostly—since seven-thirty o'clock, in the vacant lot which bordered Pearl Street.

Along about the time they came out to play, said Anna Watelowitz and Irene K. Krzanowski, they peeped through a brake of dry weeds and saw two cars drive into the narrow lane from the direction of the railroad tracks. One of the cars was brown and one was black.

Two men got out of the black car and joined another man in the brown car. The brown car went away . . . Anna Watelowitz and Irene Krzanowski picked two tomato cans full of burdock burrs. They went over to the lone man who still sat in the black car—he had turned it around until it faced toward the railroad viaduct—and they said, "Hey, mister, buy some fine popcorn, a big bag for a nickel."

But the man didn't want to buy any burdock-burr-popcorn. He had a snarly white face and he said, "You damn kids!" and they ran away as fast as they could go. They hid in a thicket of marsh grass where the man couldn't find them.

Finally, it had been quite a long time, the brown car came back. It came from the south and the men jumped out of it hastily and jumped into the black car beside the other man and went bouncing away toward the railroad tracks . . . An hour passed before Irene and Anna mustered enough courage to approach the abandoned brown sedan. When they climbed up on the running board they saw blood

inside. They ran home and told, and Mrs. Watelowitz went clear down to the phone at Poppashveli's Handy Grocery and called the police.

Dave Glennan sat with his feather cushion against his back, jingling a handful of empty .45 caliber shells in his hands. "Yeh, you better do that, Rhineheimer. Take those girls down to headquarters. Maybe they can identify those mugs. How'd you like a nice fast ride in a great big car, girlies?"

The little radio chanted, "Squad Sixteen, attention. Communicate by telephone at once. Squad Sixteen—"

Sergeant Dave Glennan did his communicating from the phone at Poppashveli's grocery. When he rejoined his companions there was a slight smile on his grim lips.

"Let's go, Frank." He slid into his seat. "They got the St. Louis paper to co-operate and send some pictures over the telephone to the *News-Detail* office. They've got 'em at the Bureau now; pictures of four hoods who trailed around with Rainy Moper in St. Louis and K. C. Maybe it's the ones."

Even a telephoto picture means a lot. There wasn't any doubt in the minds of the police and detective forces, half an hour later, that they were looking for Benjamin Farnum, Joe Vitale and Claude Powers. And according to the two little Polish girls licking their ice-cream cones in the squad room, the fourth photograph was the living image of the man who said, "You damn kids!" The fourth photograph was named James Lippert.

"Farnum, Vitale, Powers and Lippert," chanted Sergeant Dave Glennan as he climbed into the lean Packard. "We're all ready to put the finger on them, except that we don't know where they are."

Kerry swore harshly. "Highway cops! Sure, they'd let the whole army slide through them, if we were after the army—"

"Never you mind, Kerry. There's lots of cars on the highway."

"They'll be halfway to Buffalo or El Paso by now."

Glennan looked over at his kid brother, the slim patrolman with the old-young face. Nick was twirling a shiny bottle opener between his fingers. "That gadget, Nick—"

"Yes?" queried Nick smoothly.

"If you were wearing plain clothes—"

Nick Glennan said. "If I was wearing plain clothes I'd sure regret that those kids didn't note the license of the black car. The brown car, we have now learned, was stolen late last night from a roadhouse this side of Midvale, and belongs to a dentist named Holder. But the black car—those little girls did notice that it had

suitcases in it. It's their traveling car, like as not. And when men who like beer go a-traveling where do they buy their beer?"

"In grocery stores at home, before they start out."

"Not if they're in a hurry. No, indeed. It's only after they reach their destination, mind you, that they feel free to indulge in a bit of a drink. At road-stalls. At hot-dog stands. That's where they would be buying beer."

Everybody grunted.

"I never expected to be taking suggestions from a steer in harness," muttered Dave Glennan, "but we might take a drive in the country. It's a fine Indian summer day, as poor Van Wert remarked before those gorillas got him."

"Highway Twenty-six is the short line from St. Louis and Midvale. Let's mosey out to the city limits and invest in a hot-dog and a glass of beer."

Three out of the first nine road-stalls were all that sold Hoffbrau beer, and none of those road-stalls had sold even a twelve-bottle case in weeks. No, they didn't remember any four guys in a black car . . . Yes, it seemed like those guys might have been here . . . No. No spikka English. Sella nice hamburg . . . So it went.

"As a plainclothes officer, Nicholas," said Dave Glennan to his brother, "you're a stiff pain in the—"

"Don't say it," whispered Nick. "You insult me and I'll be forgetting that you still got a hunk of lead alongside your chiropractor's delight! And here's another hot-dog stand, gas station, or whatever you best can call it."

It was a rambling one-story shack at the intersection of Routes Twenty-six and Fifty-five. There were four gas pumps in front and two rest rooms in back. The owner was named Basilio Constanopolus, and yes, he carried Hoffbrau beer. "Light or dark, how many bot' you want?"

"None!" snarled Dave Glennan, and exhibited his badge.

"Listen, police," wept Mr. Constanopolus, "I ain't never sold a bootleg since we got a good beer. What the hell? No, police—"

"Talk to him, Nick," ordered the Sergeant.

Patrolman Glennan smiled his sweetest smile. "Now, Mr. Constanopolus, you think hard and try to help us. Did you sell a case of Hoffbrau during the night?"

"There was those man"—Basilio wrinkled his forehead.

"Maybe they drove in with two cars?"

"They have hamburg egg sandwich. Yes, it was so. And they buy a twelve-bot' case."

Nick twirled the opener in his hand. Mr. Constanopolus let his eyes become narrow and somber. "Those are free, for no money. They come in a case."

"They came in two sedans? Four men?"

The Greek shrugged. "Maybe four. It was pretty late they come. They eat; then they go away with the beer."

"Now," crooned Nick, "you didn't by any chance be noticing their license plates?"

Mr. Constanopolus said, "Not the one car. I see the license on the other one under the light, beside the pump."

Five pairs of hard eyes were on his face. "Yes?" drawled Dave Glennan.

"Not the number. I see the name of what state. All day I count how many state come to stop here. Some day maybe I see twenty-five. . . ."

"What was this one, buddy? What state?"

"Jefferson," said the Greek.

Nobody spoke for a moment. "Jefferson?" asked Nick slowly.

Mr. Constanopolus shrugged again. "I see," he said.

"But listen, friend, there isn't any such state."

"On the car. It is a black car, I remember now."

"What color was the license plate?"

"I don't know. It was Jefferson. I read. I have a kid what go to school. He tell me about once there was a great man here in this country it is Jefferson. So maybe he have a state name' for him, uh?"

Kerry sobbed, "Hell. Lay off, Nick. I got it."

"What?"

"The crazy foreigner means Washington. It was a Washington State license."

Obstinately, Constanopolus shook his head. "I not get the number, see, for why the hell I remember numbers? Just the name, Jefferson. I spell it, uh? Chay-ee-eff-eff-ee —"

"Ah," growled the sergeant. He opened the car door. "Come on, Nick. Get going. Maybe it was Washington, maybe not. He don't know what it's all about."

"Jefferson!" Basilio Constanopolus howled after them as the Packard crunched over the gravel and turned back toward the city again.

First-class Patrolman Glennan tried to go home and rest, but it was no go. Ordinarily, he would have been sound asleep long before this hour. The hands of the little electric clock in his kitchenette crawled past the noon hour, and he merely played with the scallops which Alice had baked for him. Finally he put on his blouse and belt and cap, snatched a kiss from the prettiest face this side of County Cork, and went down to headquarters.

"Beautiful man," he said to mutt-faced Sergeant Beasley, "we did have a colored chart that showed all the auto license numbers in the United States. What went with it?"

"You'll find it tacked beside the Museum in the other room," said Beasley, "and you ain't so damn good-looking yourself, punk. I may be within seven months of my pension, but I bet I could still plug a gas tank in a car if I had a full gun to do it with."

Nick's ears were purple. For want of any retort he went into the next room and looked at the chart of auto license plates. He leaned upon a cabinet full of rusty revolvers and dusty blackjacks and perforated stars, and studied the little colored oblongs . . . Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin . . . Most certainly, there was no State of Jefferson in the United States.

Suddenly he bent closer to the chart. His ears grew pale and purple once more. From the outer room Sergeant Beasley watched him, sniffing.

Glennan came out. His eyes were very bright and a slight flush still clung around the roots of his hair.

"Get me the Bureau, will you?" he asked of the man at the switchboard.

"Guests will use the house phones around the corner," mocked the switchboard.

Nick glared. He went around the corner to the single instrument in its dim nook.

"Is Dave Glennan out with his squad?"

The dim voice of the Bureau said, "No. He's in with the Lieutenant. Who's this calling?"

"This is Officer Glennan, his brother. Can I talk —"

"Sure. I'll get him for yuh."

Connections buzzed and stuttered . . . Dave's voice. "Yeh."

Nick said, "Tell me this, Dave —do they still think those guys left town?"

"Left town? Say, what do—"

"With airplanes and state troopers and all, tailing them all over hell. What do you think?"

Dave gulped once or twice. "Why—what makes you think they'd lie around here? Sure, it's been done before, but—"

"At night they could make it. We know they went north under that railroad viaduct from the prairies, and there's two good streets, not much traveled, leading back to town. Take a small hotel —an outlying one, you see. With garages near by, and—"

"For God's sake," yapped Sergeant Glennan, "have you gone nuts or what?"

"I'll be coming to the Bureau as fast as a cab can get me there," said the ex-sparrow cop, "and you'll be going in with me to talk to Inspector Bourse. I'm going to tell you upholstered cushion-bellies what kind of a car to look for!"

It was at the end of the fifth-floor-west corridor of the Hotel De Soto. Two adjoining rooms, 524 and 526. The occupants were listed as the Hot-Cha Orchestra from Louisville. Their

names were Morgan, Fry, Adams and Johnson. . . .

"The nerve, the brazen nerve of them!" gritted Inspector Bourse. "Using the name of a man they just killed!"

He stood beside a bed in room 508, with a throng of officers blocking the open door beyond. The operator connected him with room 524, and a coarse voice yelped nervously at him.

"This is Inspector Bourse," said the old man with the gold badge. "I want to tell you sniveling hyenas that you're washed up. No, hold on—I'll do the talking! Every room around you—on all sides, above and below—has been vacated. There are officers at the top and bottom of the fire escapes, and in opposite windows commanding your rooms. We've got machine-guns trained on your doors, and tear gas all ready to let go. You can come out with your hands up or you can stay there and take it!"

There was a long silence. Then the rasping voice began to talk, plead for a 'break' . . .

"Break?" echoed the old Inspector. "Yeh, you gave our men a break this morning, didn't you? Pie-eyed, hopped-up bums; you chopped the whole carload down! Only one of you got a shot in the arm for his pains . . . Auto accident you told the chambermaid when she saw the bloody bandages! Remember this: you can only get life in this state. So think it over, and think fast!"

Down the hall there was the sudden *blam* of an automatic. Old Bourse dropped the phone on the bed. "So, that's their answer, eh?" he cried. "Let 'em have it, boys! The taxpayers'll foot the bill for damages!"

Five machine-guns began to pound. . . .

They carried them away in four neat, body-length baskets of brown wicker. Two officers had been wounded, none seriously. Up in his temporary headquarters in room 508, old Inspector Bourse patted Nick Glennan's arm as that embarrassed young man slid his gun into his holster.

"Smoke up!" he said to the Glennan boys. "Here—twenty-five centers and never say the old man is a tight-wad . . . Boys, I knew your grandfather; I was just a little kid when he got killed in the anarchist's riot. But I do remember him, and I want to say that the old fellow must be very, very proud of you tonight."

"I didn't do a damn thing, Inspector," growled Dave. "It was all the doings of my kid brother."

"And him still with a stiff arm and unsteady shoulder from that affray last March," nodded the Inspector. "It's quite like a Glennan not to whine around and alibi because he wasn't shooting so good, and all of a sudden. Well, Nick—and I hope to see you a sergeant like your brother before

you're many months older—I must say that your deduction on those license plates was a slick piece of work. It was easy enough for us to run the car down, once you gave us the tip. The boys got it in the thirteenth garage they went to, and the rest was easy, too."

Nick's ears were red again. "I just played a hunch, sir, about them not having run out of town."

"But what good would the hunch have done if you hadn't lined up the car? Sure it isn't every cop could spot a car on the evidence you had."

First-class Patrolman Glennan wriggled but his weary face was grinning. "The Greek had a word for it, sir! 'Jefferson,' he said, and of course we thought he was crazy. But I went down to headquarters and had a look at the chart of license plates. Just by chance I noticed that Kentucky—You see how it was, Inspector, the Kentucky license was number 345-328; a hot car, no doubt—but it had the letters K-Y very small in one corner, and the number 33 very small in the other. And all the way across the bottom was the name of the county: *Jefferson.* It's an odd way they must have in Kentucky, putting the names of their counties on the license plates."

"From Kentucky," said Sergeant Dave Glennan, "come fast horses and beautiful women. From the Glennan family comes cops. If you wouldn't object, Inspector, I'd like to offer us all a little drink—just for luck. I'm mighty proud of my ugly relative, and—"

Inspector Bourse thrust out his jaw. "Of course I object, Sergeant! It's contrary to law and regulations and the best traditions of our department . . . Ring immediately for plenty of ice and lots of ginger ale!"


*Dick Paine never took anything that didn't belong to him . . . except other men's lives.*

**MURDER GATHERS MOMENTUM**

***An Extraordinary Novelet***

***By CORNELL WOOLRICH***

in the next SAINT

# mission accomplished

*by . . . Bevis Winter*

The mission was a murder, the moment for which he'd waited years.

THE MUTTERING voices outside my office disturbed me so much that it was utterly impossible to concentrate on the law brief on which I was working.

I wondered irately what Miss Kelly was doing. Was the noisy visitor someone determined to see me without an appointment? If so, why the blazes didn't she let me deal with the fellow. But the voices went on and on . . .

Finally, I tossed aside the brief I was reading, went over to the door and flung it open. In the outer office I saw Miss Kelly gamely clutching the gate and arguing, in her lady-like manner, with a huge hulk of a man. He was glaring down into Miss Kelly's violet eyes, insisting on an immediate interview with Mr. Calvin Scott.

I said, "What's going on here?"

"Oh, I'm sorry, Mr. Scott," said Miss Kelly. "This gentleman refuses to make an appointment or to go away. I've told him—"

"I want to see you now, Scott," the visitor said. "Tell her to let me in." He was unkempt in appearance, brusque in his manner. I had never seen him before.

I answered politely but firmly,

*Thirty-five-year-old Bevis Winter has written three and a half million words (more or less) in the past half-dozen years. A prodigious output that includes about eighty books and over a hundred short stories . . . shades of Edgar Wallace. We hope to bring you more of his thrillers.*

"If you wish to see me Miss Kelly will make an appointment for you. That's what she's here for."

"I can't wait for an appointment," he said. "I must see you right away. It's a matter of life and death."

"It always is," I snapped. "But I'm extremely busy—"

"It's a matter of murder," he broke in.

I stared at him, wondering if he was in his right mind. There was a look in his too-bright, staring eyes that made me realize that it might he easier to see him for a few moments than convince him that I was too busy to see him.

I made a decision, settling the matter without causing Miss Kelly any loss of face. I said, "I can spare you ten minutes before I go to court. Will that do?"

He nodded, walked through the swinging gate and went towards my door. Miss Kelly, visibly annoyed, glared at me. I hastily followed the insistent client.

I closed the door, indicated a seat, went behind my desk. He ignored my gesture, leaned across the desk, gazing intently into my face.

"I'm on my way to Florida. Before I go I want you to handle a case for me."

"What sort of a case?" I demanded, annoyed by his brusqueness.

He said, "By tomorrow I shall have committed what the police will consider a very serious crime."

I said, "You've come to the wrong lawyer. I don't run that sort of a practice."

"Don't interrupt," he said bluntly. "I can tell you right away that it's a case you can't lose. I'll just be protecting my interests, that's all. But the police are probably going to call it a crime."

"Outside you said something about murder," I said.

"Yes, it will be murder," he said grimly. His bearded chin stuck out threateningly and the lines around his eyes deepened. "And I want you to represent me. But you won't have to defend me, actually . . ."

It began to dawn on me that I was dealing with a maniac. I moved my hand cautiously toward the press-button on the desk. He saw the move, grinned suddenly.

"Oh, don't get scared, Scott," he drawled. "I'm not crazy. I'm saner than you. Lots saner than most people on the outside."

"On—the—outside . . ." I echoed slowly. "You've been in jail?"

"I've just been released. This morning. And I've waited fifteen years to settle this business."

I had to make another quick decision. Perhaps I was dealing with a lunatic. But I was quite sure that I was dealing with a man who was hoarding an obsession. Experience with prison inmates had taught me that their psychological maladjustment could be

disastrous if their grievance was denied outlet. It was best to let them talk.

I gave him a cigarette and asked him again to sit down. This time he sat.

"Take it easy, old man," I said. "Tell me the story, then I'll be better equipped to help you."

He drew deeply on the cigarette, started to talk. "Do you remember the Fingale case in 1939?"

"No," I said.

"It was a murder case. A woman named Elizabeth Fingale was murdered by her husband. The husband, Alfred Fingale, got twenty years. The charge was reduced to manslaughter."

I groped down into my memory for details of the case to which he referred. In 1939 I was still a student. I said, "If what you have to tell me is connected with that case you'd better give me the whole story."

"The woman was supposed to have been stabbed to death and thrown into the sea by her husband. There was a lot of evidence against the husband, mainly circumstantial. His fingerprints were found on a bread-knife in the dining room; blood was splashed about in the house. The husband had been overheard arguing with his wife, threatening to kill her. A postman and a gardener testified they'd heard those threats. Footprints—the husband's footprints—were found leading down to the sea from the cottage where they lived. There was even a motive—the husband had found out that his wife was unfaithful. There was a young doctor involved, a Dr. Erasmus Stirling."

"Well?" I prompted when he paused. He pursed his lips and let a stream of cigarette smoke curl out into the air.

He said slowly, softly, "I am Fingale. Alfred Fingale. I served fifteen years for that killing. Fifteen out of the twenty I got for manslaughter."

I nodded. "I guessed as much as you spoke," I told him. "I suppose you've spent the years brooding about that doctor and now you aim to kill him out of vengeance?"

He said nothing. I went on, "You're acting foolishly. You can't get away with it. Vengeance is stupid. Forget it. Make a fresh start. If there's—"

"Hold your horses, Mr. Scott," he drawled. "You're barking up the wrong tree."

"What do you mean?" I gazed at him curiously.

"I'm not going to kill Dr. Stirling. Oh, yes, I know where he is, all right. I've known for years, through one of my friends on the outside. There's not one thing he's done these past fifteen years that I don't know about. But I'm not going to kill *him*."

"Then I don't understand," I said. "You'd better make yourself clear about this. And please

hurry because I'm due in court shortly."

"I didn't kill my wife," he said, his voice now harsh. "I never killed anyone. I was a young man at that time. My aunt had just died and left me some money. Thirty thousand dollars. Elizabeth and I had been going together for a long time, but she didn't want to marry me. I didn't make enough money, for one thing. But things changed when I inherited the money. We got married. She talked me into investing in some tourist cabins in Florida. I didn't know why at the time, but I found out afterwards that she'd been two-timing me with the son of our doctor—the son was a doctor too—a surgeon.

"I was a young fool and I hadn't had much experience with women, or in business. In no time at all she managed to get it all invested, in her own name. I let her handle the financial matters, and I did the job of running the cabins. I was busy eighteen hours out of the twenty-four. And all that time she must have been carrying on with Dr. Stirling. Once she went down to Miami for a rest. The cabins were making money by then and we had a staff, so I decided to join her after a few days. I decided to surprise her—and found her with Stirling.

"After that we frequently quarreled. I suspected her of plans to divorce me and marry Stirling. She had a vicious way of irritating me, deliberately rousing my temper. Several people heard us quarreling. I threatened to kill her several times, in moments of high anger.

"Then one night I caught her opening a letter. She tried to hide it when she saw me and I suspected the letter was from Stirling. I demanded to know what was in it. She refused to say. She still had the knife she'd been using to open the letter, a bread-knife. In an angry gesture she banged the knife on the table, the handle broke, and she cut her hand across the palm. It bled quite a lot. I got some gauze and tried to stem the flow. She wouldn't let me call a doctor. The blood was smeared over everything. It looked like we'd killed a chicken and let it roam about the kitchen with its head chopped off.

"The bread-knife was on the floor. I picked it up and was going to wash it when she told me to put it down and fasten the bandage tighter. I put the knife on the table and forgot all about it. The accident made me forget my anger. She seemed to be happy about it when I apologized for my outburst of anger. She promised to give Stirling up.

"She told me she'd take all his letters and the presents he'd given her, and throw them into the sea. I laughed and told her not to be silly. I said we could burn the things or send them back to him.

But she insisted. She agreed to burn the letters but she wanted the rest of the things thrown into the sea. I decided to humor her. After all, I had won her back and I was happy about that. I was, as I say, young and I had not had much experience with women.

"So I took the trunk she filled with the things Stirling had given her down to the beach that night and threw it into the sea. It was a big old wardrobe trunk and it gave me some trouble. When I was coming back, I found that Elizabeth had followed me down to the beach. She had removed her shoes and walked on the soft wet sand beside the narrow path. I, carrying the heavy trunk, had walked on the harder ground. That was a point that had significance later, when they found only my footprints going down to the sea—hers were erased by the movement of the soft sand.

"Not only had she followed me, but the bandage was off her hand, and it was bleeding again, and the blood dropped on the dry sand where I had walked, on top of *my* footprints.

"When we got back to the cottage she said she'd go over to the hospital and get her hand fixed while I signed in the over-night tourists. She was calmer now so I let her go alone.

"Well, I waited. I waited for hours. She never came back. In fact, I never saw her again after that.

"I was worried, of course. My first thought was Stirling, and I went to see him. He swore he hadn't seen my wife for several weeks. Then *he* got suspicious, started asking me a lot of questions. I got sore and walked out on him, refusing to answer any of them. A few minutes after I got home the police arrived.

"The police questioned me politely at first. I told them the truth about what had happened, and that Elizabeth had gone to get her hand dressed. They phoned the hospital to check and were told she hadn't been there.

"Then they found the bloody knife in the kitchen. My fingerprints were on it. They found my footprints and the blood-drops on the sandy path leading to the beach—my footprints, deep in the dry sand, indicating that I'd carried a heavy load. But Elizabeth's footprints were gone because she had walked in the wet sand. They asked me what my relations were with my wife. I told the truth.

"Then the people who had heard us quarreling, heard me threaten to kill her, were questioned. One thing after another until the police suspected me of murdering Elizabeth and throwing her into the sea. Meanwhile, the tide had gone out and there was no sign of the trunk.

"There was nothing I could do. Elizabeth had vanished and everything pointed to my having done

away with her. A few days afterwards the trunk was washed ashore down the coast, open and empty.

"Her body was never washed ashore, although the whole coast was alerted and watched night and day for weeks. Without the body, my lawyer pleaded no corpus delicti, and that was our main line of defense.

"The charge was reduced to manslaughter. I was convicted and sent up for twenty years, five off for good behavior. And now I'm out."

As he finished speaking, I looked at my watch. I was late for court. I said, "Your story takes a lot of believing. Is it the same story you told the court?"

He nodded. "Almost. Some of the details I figured out later, in prison. Things like her walking deliberately in the wet sand, going down to the beach that night, so there'd be only my footprints. And tearing off the bandage so there'd be blood on the sand. Gradually I pieced everything together and it made sense—"

"You mean you think your wife is still alive, that she and this other man framed you? That they planned the whole thing?"

"Of course! It was her vicious plan to get rid of me so she could marry him. I expect Dr. Stirling planned most of it. She wasn't smart enough. It was all so perfect. But I'll show—"

I interrupted him. "Have you tried to locate your wife? Perhaps she lost her memory, suffered amnesia."

He shook his head. "She isn't dead. She vanished all right, but not with loss of memory. She'd cached away some dough to live on and she went away until they'd tried me and sent me away. Then she returned. She'd changed her appearance, adopted a new name. And now she's Mrs. Stirling."

"You mean she married the doctor? How do you know this?"

He said grimly, "I've got friends. They got me snapshots of Stirling's wife, the one he married after I was gone. And they've kept me posted about everything that Stirling has done during the past fifteen years. He's even fathered two of her kids."

"But the woman's a bigamist, if your story is true," I said. He had me almost convinced in spite of my attempt to remain objective. He'd told his story so simply, so directly.

"She's worse than that," he said bitterly. "She plotted to kill me, to get me hanged for a murder I didn't commit. It was just luck that I got twenty years in jail instead of death."

"Did you tell the police about this?" I asked him. "About your suspicion that Stirling's wife is *your* wife?"

"No," he growled harshly. "I was waiting to see Stirling. This is between him and me now."

"You've been in touch with

him? Have you talked to him since you were released?"

"I phoned him for an appointment this morning." He smiled suddenly, patting the bulge of his pocket. "I've got a little present for him. He agreed to see me this afternoon. He thinks my name is Menzies. Actually I told him it was Nemesis, but he misunderstood me, repeated it as Menzies." He chuckled. "I shan't keep him long."

"What are you going to do?" I demanded.

"Will you take the case?"

"What case?" I growled impatiently. "What case are you talking about?"

"I shall be arrested for murder," he said, slowly. "It won't take much of your time because they can't try me twice for the same murder. You see, *I am going to kill Elizabeth Fingale*. How do you like that for retribution? I shall kill her openly, calmly, thinking all the time of those fifteen years I spent in the pen. And I will not be tried for it because they can't try me for the murder of a dead woman."

I stared at the man, aghast.

"You can't do this!" I said. "You can't get away with it." But I knew that he *could* get away with it, if he could prove that Mrs. Stirling was his wife, Elizabeth. Alfred Fingale had already served time for the murder of his wife, Elizabeth Fingale.

"But have you proof—can you *prove* she is your wife?" I asked.

He said, "If I can, will you take the case?"

Automatically, I nodded.

Without another word he got up, strode to the door and out of my office.

It was an amazing situation. Thinking quickly, I grabbed the telephone and put through a call to the police. I spoke to my friend, Inspector Robert Hervey, told him quickly what he needed to know. I knew there was no time to lose.

I canceled my appointments for that day. I couldn't eat any lunch. At three o'clock a call came from the police department.

"We've just arrested a man named Alfred Fingale, Mr. Scott. He says you're his lawyer. He wants to see you. He has a right to talk to you, of course, but—"

"I'll be right over," I cut in. "What's he charged with?"

"Murder," snapped the Inspector. "He walked into a doctor's office and shot the doctor's wife down in cold blood. We figure the guy's a lunatic. But he's got a right, just the same, to see his lawyer."

Ten minutes later I was at police headquarters. Fingale was in the inspector's office, slumped in a chair. He looked stricken, crushed. I felt a surge of pity for him. He didn't seem aware of my presence, of anything that went on around him.

"You can't hold my client, you

know," I said to the inspector. "It's a case of—"

The inspector broke. "I know," he growled. "A man can't be tried twice for the same murder." He laughed harshly. "But you've got a case, Scott—*he shot the wrong woman!*"

I sat down abruptly. "He did what?" I gasped.

"Shot the wrong woman. He told us the whole story. It's been checked against evidence that cropped up recently in a will dispute. His wife *is* alive, all right, and she's married to a Dr. Stirling. But not to the Dr. Stirling he went to see this morning. The woman he killed was formerly a Miss Angela Truelove."

"You mean there are *two* doctors of the same name practicing in town?" I asked weakly.

"As a matter of fact," the inspector replied, "there are three."

"But—but didn't Fingale *see* that the woman wasn't his wife, Elizabeth?"

The inspector shrugged. "It's an old story," he said. "The guy planned a cold-blooded murder for years, while he sat in jail. He was cool and calculating about it then, as they always are in cases like this. But when the moment came he lost his head, got excited. He went to the doctor's house, where he also has his office. The woman who let him in directed him to the inner office when he asked for Mrs. Stirling. He went in shooting . . ."

I nodded. "And he expected her to look different. His friends had told him she'd changed her appearance before she came back to town to marry the doctor."

Fingale looked up, seemed to see me for the first time. His voice was a whisper. "I'd forgotten there were three of them. His father was a doctor and he had a brother, too, who studied medicine. The kid brother was still in medical school when I went to jail. It was his wife I killed . . ."

*And always on hand is our beloved Simon Templar. As you've probably noticed he's been following his saintly star of destiny as he roams the Caribbean—visiting those countries and islands around that fabulous, romantic body of water. As usual, a lovely lady and, of course, a mean man —and the exquisite buccaneer to right all wrongs. So, watch for the new adventure of the Saint in the next issue of* THE SAINT DETECTIVE MAGAZINE.

# sense of humor

*by . . . Damon Runyon*

Many citizens are horrified when Joe the Joker gives the hot-foot to Frankie Ferocious and run for cover as no good will come of it.

ONE NIGHT I am standing in front of Mindy's restaurant on Broadway, thinking of practically nothing whatever, when all of a sudden I feel a very terrible pain in my left foot.

In fact, this pain is so very terrible that it causes me to leap up and down like a bullfrog, to let out loud cries of agony, and to speak some very profane language, which is by no means my custom, although of course I recognize the pain as coming from a hot-foot, because I have experienced this pain before.

Furthermore, I know Joe the Joker must be in the neighborhood, as Joe the Joker has the most wonderful sense of humor of anybody in this town, and is always around giving people the hot-foot, and gives it to me more times than I can remember. In fact I hear Joe the Joker invents the hot-foot, and it finally becomes a very popular idea all over the country.

The way you give a hot-foot is to sneak up behind some guy who is standing around thinking of not

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From "Money From Home"—published by J. B. Lippincott Company
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much, and stick a paper match in his shoe between the sole and the upper along about where his little toe ought to be, and then light the match. By and by the guy will feel a terrible pain in his foot, and will start stamping around and hollering and carrying on generally, and it is always a most comical sight and a wonderful laugh to one and all to see him suffer.

No one in the world can give a hot-foot as good as Joe the Joker, because it takes a guy who can sneak up very quiet on the guy who is to get the hot-foot, and Joe can sneak up so quiet many guys on Broadway are willing to lay you odds that he can give a mouse a hot-foot if you can find a mouse that wears shoes. Furthermore, Joe the Joker can take plenty of care of himself in case the guy who gets the hot-foot feels like taking the matter up, which sometimes happens, especially with guys who get their shoes made to order at forty bobs per copy and do not care to have holes burned in these shoes.

But Joe does not care what kind of shoes the guys are wearing when he feels like giving out hot-foots. And, furthermore, he does not care who the guys are, although many citizens think he makes a mistake the time he gives a hot-foot to Frankie Ferocious. In fact, many citizens are greatly horrified by this action, and go around saying no good will come of it.

This Frankie Ferocious comes from over in Brooklyn where he is considered a rising citizen in many respects, and by no means a guy to give hot-foots to, especially as Frankie Ferocious has no sense of humor whatever. In fact, he is always very solemn, and nobody ever sees him laugh, and he certainly does not laugh when Joe the Joker gives him a hot-foot one day on Broadway when Frankie Ferocious is standing talking over a business matter with some guys from the Bronx.

He only scowls at Joe and says something in Italian, and while I do not understand Italian it sounds so unpleasant that I guarantee I will leave town inside of the next two hours if he says it to me.

Of course Frankie Ferocious' name is not really Ferocious, but something in Italian like Feroccio, and I hear he originally comes from Sicily, although he lives in Brooklyn for quite some years. From a modest beginning he builds himself up until he is a very large operator in merchandise of one kind and another, especially alcohol. He is a big guy of maybe thirty-odd, and he has hair blacker than a yard up a chimney, and black eyes and black eyebrows, and a slow way of looking at people.

Nobody knows a whole lot about Frankie Ferocious because

he never has much to say and he takes his time saying it. But everybody gives him plenty of room when he comes around, as there are rumors that Frankie never likes to be crowded. As far as I am concerned, I do not care for any part of Frankie Ferocious because his slow way of looking at people always makes me nervous. And I am always sorry Joe the Joker gives him a hot-foot because I figure Frankie Ferocious is bound to consider it a most disrespectful action, and hold it against everybody that lives on the Island of Manhattan.

But Joe the Joker only laughs when anybody tells him he is out of line in giving Frankie the hot-foot, and says it is not his fault if Frankie has no sense of humor. Furthermore, Joe says he will not only give Frankie another hot-foot if he gets a chance, but that he will give hot-foots to the Duke of Windsor and Wally if he catches them in the right spot, although Regret the horse player states that Joe can have twenty-to-one any time that he will not give the Duke or Wally any hot-foots and get away with it.

Anyway, just as I suspect there is Joe the Joker, watching me when I feel the hot-foot, and he is laughing very heartily. And furthermore, a large number of other citizens are also laughing heartily because Joe the Joker never sees any fun in giving people the hot-foot unless others are present to enjoy the funny joke.

Well, naturally when I see who it is gives me the hot-foot, I join in the laughter and go over and shake hands with Joe. And when I shake hands with him there is more laughter because it seems Joe has a hunk of Limburger cheese in his duke, and what I shake hands with is this Limburger. Furthermore, it is some of Mindy's Limburger cheese and everybody knows Mindy's Limburger is very squashy and also smells very loud.

Of course I laugh at this too, although to tell the truth, I will laugh much more heartily if Joe the Joker drops dead in front of me, because I do not like to be made the subject of laughter on Broadway. But my laugh is really quite hearty when Joe takes the rest of the cheese that is not on my fingers and smears it on the steering wheels of some automobiles parked in front of Mindy's, because I get to thinking of what the drivers will say when they start steering their cars.

Then I get to talking to Joe the Joker, and I ask him how things are up in Harlem where Joe and his younger brother, Freddy, and several other guys have a small organization operating in beer. And Joe says things are as good as can be expected considering business conditions. Then I ask him how Rosa is getting along, this Rosa being Joe the Joker's ever-loving wife and a personal

friend of mine, as I know her when she is Rosa Midnight and is singing in the old Hot Box before Joe hauls off and marries her.

Well, at this question Joe the Joker starts laughing and I can see that something appeals to his sense of humor, and finally he speaks as follows:

"Why," he says, "do you not hear the news about Rosa? She takes the wind on me a couple of months ago for my friend Frankie Ferocious, and is living in an apartment over in Brooklyn right near his house. Of course you understand I am telling you this only to answer your question, and not to holler copper on Rosa."

Then he lets out another large ha-ha, and in fact Joe the Joker keeps laughing until I am afraid he will injure himself internally. Personally, I do not see anything comical in a guy's ever-loving wife taking the wind on him for a guy like Frankie Ferocious, so when Joe the Joker quiets down a bit I ask him what is funny about the proposition.

"Why," Joe says, "I have to laugh every time I think of how the big greaseball is going to feel when he finds out how expensive Rosa is. I do not know how many things Frankie Ferocious has running for him in Brooklyn," Joe says, "but he better try to move himself in on the mint if he wishes to keep Rosa going."

Then he laughs again and I consider it wonderful the way Joe is able to keep his sense of humor even in such a situation as this, although, up to this time I always think Joe is very daffy indeed about Rosa, who is quite a doll, weighing maybe ninety pounds with her hat on and quite cute.

Now I judge from what Joe the Joker tells me that Frankie Ferocious knows Rosa before Joe marries her and is always pitching to her when she is singing in the Hot Box. And even after she is Joe's ever-loving wife Frankie occasionally calls her up, especially when he commences to be a rising citizen of Brooklyn, although of course Joe does not learn about these calls until later. And about the time Frankie Ferocious commences to be a rising citizen of Brooklyn, things begin breaking a little tough for Joe the Joker, what with the recession and all, and he has to economize on Rosa in spots. And if there is one thing Rosa cannot stand it is being economized on.

Along about now Joe the Joker gives Frankie Ferocious the hotfoot, and just as many citizens state at the time, it is a mistake for Frankie starts calling Rosa up more than somewhat and speaking of what a nice place Brooklyn is to live in—which it is, at that—and between these boosts for Brooklyn and Joe the Joker's economy, Rosa hauls off and takes the subway to Borough Hall, leaving Joe a note telling

him that if he does not like it he knows what he can do.

"Well, Joe," I say, after listening to his story, "I always hate to hear of these little domestic difficulties among my friends, but maybe this is all for the best. Still, I feel sorry for you, if it will do you any good," I say.

"Do not feel sorry for me," Joe says. "If you wish to feel sorry for anybody, feel sorry for Frankie Ferocious, and," he says, "if you can spare a little more sorrow, give it to Rosa."

And Joe the Joker laughs very hearty again and starts telling me about a little scatter that he has up in Harlem where he keeps a chair fixed up with electric wires so he can give anybody that sits down in it a nice jolt, which sounds very humorous to me, at that, especially when Joe tells me how they turn on too much juice one night and almost kill Commodore Jake.

Finally, Joe says he has to get back to Harlem, but first he goes to the telephone in the corner cigar store and calls up Mindy's and imitates a doll's voice and tells Mindy he is Peggy Joyce, or somebody, and orders fifty dozen sandwiches sent up at once to an apartment in West Seventy-second Street for a birthday party, although of course there is no such number as he gives, and nobody there will wish fifty dozen sandwiches if there is such a number.

Then Joe gets in his car and starts off, and while he is waiting for the traffic lights at Fiftieth Street, I see citizens on the sidewalks making sudden leaps, and looking around very fierce, and I know Joe the Joker is plugging them with pellets made out of tin foil, which he fires from a rubber band hooked between his thumb and forefinger.

Joe the Joker is very expert with this proposition, and it is very funny to see the citizens jump, although once or twice in his life, Joe makes a miscue and knocks out somebody's eye. But it is all in fun, and shows you what a wonderful sense of humor Joe has.

Well, a few days later I see by the papers where a couple of Harlem guys Joe the Joker is mobbed up with are found done up in sacks over in Brooklyn, very dead indeed, and the coppers say it is because they are trying to move in on certain business enterprises that belong to nobody but Frankie Ferocious.

But of course the coppers do not say Frankie Ferocious puts these guys in the sacks, because in the first place Frankie will report them to Headquarters if the coppers say such a thing about him, and in the second place putting guys in sacks is strictly a St. Louis idea and to have a guy in a sack properly you have to send to St. Louis for experts in this matter.

Now, putting a guy in a sack

is not as easy as it sounds, and in fact it takes quite a lot of practice and experience. To put a guy in a sack properly you first have to put him to sleep, because naturally no guy is going to walk into a sack wide awake unless he is a plumb sucker. Some people claim the best way to put a guy to sleep is to give him a sleeping powder of some kind in a drink, but the real experts just tap the guy on the noggin with a blackjack, which saves the expense of buying the drink.

Anyway, after the guy is asleep you double him up like a pocketknife, and tie a cord or a wire around his neck and under his knees. Then you put him in a gunny sack, leave him some place, and by-and-by when the guy wakes up and finds himself in the sack, naturally he wants to get out and the first thing he does is to try to straighten out his knees. This pulls the cord around his neck up so tight that after a while the guy is all out of breath.

So then when somebody comes along and opens the sack they find the guy dead, and nobody is responsible for this unfortunate situation, because after all the guy really commits suicide, because if he does not try to straighten out his knees he may live to a ripe old age, if he recovers from the tap on the noggin.

Well, a couple of days later I see by the papers where three Brooklyn citizens are scragged as they are walking peaceably along Clinton Street, the scragging being done by some parties in an automobile who seem to have a machine gun. And the papers state that the citizens are friends of Frankie Ferocious and that it is rumored the parties with the machine gun are from Harlem.

I judge by this that there is some trouble in Brooklyn, especially as about a week after the citizens are scragged in Clinton Street another Harlem guy is found done up in a sack like a Virginia ham near Prospect Park, and now who is it but Joe the Joker's brother, Freddy, and I know Joe is going to be greatly displeased by this.

By and by it gets so nobody in Brooklyn will open as much as a sack of potatoes without first calling the gendarmes, for fear a pair of No. 8 shoes will jump out at them.

Now, one night I see Joe the Joker and this time he is all alone, and I wish to say I am willing to leave him all alone, because something tells me he is hotter than a stove. But he grabs me as I am going past, so naturally I stop to talk to him, and the first thing I say is how sorry I am about his brother.

"Well," Joe the Joker says, "Freddy is always a kind of a sap. Rosa calls him up and asks him to come over to Brooklyn to see her. She wishes to talk to

Freddy about getting me to give her a divorce," Joe says, "so she can marry Frankie Ferocious, I suppose. Anyway," he says, "Freddy tells Commodore Jake why he is going to see her. Freddy always likes Rosa and thinks maybe he can patch it up between us. So." Joe says, "he winds up in a sack. They get him after he leaves her apartment. I do not claim Rosa will ask him to come over if she has any idea he will be sacked," Joe says, "but," he says, "she is responsible. She is a bad-luck doll.

"Say," he says, "I am going to play a wonderful joke on Frankie Ferocious."

"Well, Joe," I say, "you are not asking me for advice, but I am going to give you some free gratis, and for nothing. Do not play any jokes on Frankie Ferocious, as I hear he has no more sense of humor than a goat."

"Oh," Joe the Joker says, "he must have some sense of humor somewhere to stand for Rosa. I hear he is daffy about her. In fact I understand she is the only person in the world he really likes and trusts. But I must play a joke on him. I am going to have myself delivered to Frankie Ferocious in a sack."

Well, of course I have to laugh at this myself, and Joe the Joker laughs with me. Personally, I am laughing just at the idea of anybody having themselves delivered to Frankie Ferocious in a sack.

"Listen," Joe says, finally, "a guy from St. Louis who is a friend of mine is doing most of the sacking for Frankie Ferocious. His name is Ropes McGonnigle. In fact," Joe says, "he is a very dear old pal of mine, and he has a wonderful sense of humor like me. Ropes McGonnigle has nothing whatever to do with sacking Freddy," Joe says, "and he is very indignant about it since he finds out Freddy is my brother, so he is anxious to help me play a joke on Frankie.

"Only last night," Joe says, "Frankie Ferocious sends for Ropes and tells him he will appreciate it as a special favor if Ropes will bring me to him in a sack. I suppose," Joe says, "that Frankie Ferocious hears from Rosa what Freddy is bound to tell her about my ideas on divorce. I have very strict ideas on divorce," Joe says, "especially where Rosa is concerned. I will see her in what's-this before I ever do her and Frankie Ferocious such a favor as a divorce.

"Anyway," Joe the Joker says, "Ropes tells me about Frankie Ferocious propositioning him, so I send Ropes back to Frankie Ferocious to tell him he knows I am to be in Brooklyn tomorrow night, and furthermore, Ropes tells Frankie that he will have me in a sack. And so he will."

"Well," I say, "personally, I see no percentage in being delivered to Frankie Ferocious in

a sack, because as near as I can make out from what I read in the papers, there is no future for a guy in a sack that goes to Frankie Ferocious. What I cannot figure out," I say, "is where the joke on Frankie comes in."

"Why," Joe the Joker says, "the joke is, I will not be asleep in the sack, and my hands will not be tied, and in each of my hands I will have a John Roscoe, so when the sack is delivered to Frankie Ferocious and I pop out blasting away, can you not imagine his astonishment?"

Well, I can imagine this, all right. In fact, when I get to thinking of the look of surprise that is bound to come to Frankie Ferocious' face when Joe the Joker comes out of the sack, I have to laugh, and Joe the Joker laughs right along with me.

"Of course," Joe says, "Ropes McGonnigle will be there to start blasting away with me, in case Frankie Ferocious happens to have any company."

Then Joe the Joker goes on up the street, leaving me still laughing from thinking of how amazed Frankie Ferocious will be when Joe bounces out of the sack and starts throwing slugs around and about. I do not hear of Joe from that time to this, but I hear the rest of the story from very reliable parties.

It seems that Ropes McGonnigle does not deliver the sack himself, after all, but sends it by an expressman to Frankie Ferocious' home. Frankie Ferocious receives many sacks such as this in his time, because it seems that it is a sort of passion with him to personally view the contents of the sack and check up on them before they are distributed about the city, and of course Ropes McGonnigle knows about this passion from doing so much sacking for Frankie.

When the expressman takes the sack into Frankie's house, Frankie personally lugs it down into his basement, and there he outs with a big John Roscoe and fires six shots into the sack, because it seems Ropes McGonnigle tips him off to Joe the Joker's plan to pop out of the sack and start blasting.

I hear Frankie Ferocious has a very strange expression on his pan and is laughing the only laugh anybody ever hears from him when the gendarmes break in and put the arm on him for murder, because it seems that when Ropes McGonnigle tells Frankie of Joe the Joker's plan, Frankie tells Ropes what he is going to do with his own hands before opening the sack. Naturally, Ropes speaks to Joe the Joker of Frankie's idea about filling the sack full of slugs, and Joe's sense of humor comes right out again.

So, bound and gagged, but otherwise as right as rain in the sack that is delivered to Frankie Ferocious, is by no means Joe the Joker, but Rosa.

# the green man

*by . . . G. K. Chesterton*

**When Father Brown started talking in parables it added up to his knowing who the murderer was.**

A YOUNG MAN in knickerbockers, with an eager sanguine profile, was playing golf against himself on the links that lay parallel to the sand and sea, which were all growing grey with twilight. He was not carelessly knocking a ball about, but rather practising particular strokes with a sort of microscopic fury; like a neat and tidy whirlwind.

He had learned many games quickly, but he had a disposition to learn them a little more quickly than they can be learnt. He was rather prone to be a victim of those remarkable invitations by which a man may learn the Violin in Six Lessons—or acquire a perfect French accent by a Correspondence Course. He lived in the breezy atmosphere of such hopeful advertisement and adventure.

He was at present the private secretary of Admiral Sir Michael Craven, who owned the big house behind the park abutting on the links. He was ambitious, and had no intention of continuing indefinitely to be private secretary to anybody. But he was also reasonable; and he knew that the best way of ceasing to be a secretary

*During a period when the crime story was drifting toward romantic theatricalism and pseudo-science, Gilbert K. Chesterton gave the genre a seriousness and validity that kept it in the realm of serious reading. Aided, that is, by the simplicity and directness of Father Brown, that frocked crime solver of countless of Chesterton's timeless murder mystery stories.*


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was to be a very good secretary.

Consequently he was a very good secretary, dealing with the ever accumulating arrears of the Admiral's correspondence with the same swift centripetal concentration with which he addressed the golfball. He had to struggle with the correspondence alone and at his own discretion at present for the Admiral had been with his ship for the last six months; and, though now returning, was not expected for hours, possibly days.

With an athletic stride, the young man, whose name was Harold Harker, crested the rise of turf that was the rampart of the links and, looking out across the sands to the sea, saw a strange sight. He did not see it very clearly for the dusk was darkening every minute under stormy clouds; but it seemed to him, by a sort of momentary illusion, like a dream of days long past or a drama played by ghosts, out of another age in history.

The last of the sunset lay in long bars of copper and gold above the last dark strip of sea that seemed rather black than blue. But blacker still against this gleam in the west there passed in sharp outline, like figures in a shadow pantomime, two men with three-cornered cocked hats and swords; as if they had just landed from one of the wooden ships of Nelson.

It was not at all the sort of hallucination that would have come natural to Mr. Harker, had he been prone to hallucinations. He was of the type that is at once sanguine and scientific; and would be more likely to fancy the flying-ships of the future than the fighting-ships of the past. He therefore very sensibly came to the conclusion that even a futurist can believe his eyes.

His illusion did not last more than a moment. On a second glance what he saw was unusual but not incredible. The two men who were striding in single file across the sands, one some fifteen yards behind the other, were ordinary modern naval officers, but naval officers wearing that almost extravagant full-dress uniform which naval officers never do wear if they can possibly help it; only on great ceremonial occasions such as the visits of Royalty.

In the man walking in front, who seemed more or less unconscious of the man walking behind, Harker recognized at once the high-bridged nose and spike-shaped beard of his own employer, the Admiral. The other man following in his tracks he did not know.

But he did know something about the circumstances connected with the ceremonial occasion. He knew that when the Admiral's ship put in at the adjacent port it was to be formally visited by a Great Personage; which was enough to

explain the officers being in full dress. But what could have possessed the Admiral to come on shore in that rig-out when he could seize five minutes to change into mufti or at least into undress uniform, was more than his secretary could conceive. It seemed somehow to be the very last thing he would do. It was indeed to remain for many weeks one of the chief mysteries of this mysterious business. As it was, the outline of these fantastic court uniforms against the empty scenery, striped with dark sea and sand, had something suggestive of comic opera; and reminded the spectator of *The Pinafore*.

The second figure was much more singular; somewhat singular in appearance despite his correct lieutenant's uniform, and still more extraordinary in behaviour. He walked in a strangely irregular and uneasy manner—sometimes quickly and sometimes slowly—as if he could not make up his mind whether to overtake the Admiral or not. The Admiral was rather deaf and certainly heard no footsteps behind him on the yielding sand; but the footsteps behind him, if traced in the detective manner, would have given rise to twenty conjectures from a limp to a dance.

The man's face was swarthy as well as darkened with shadow and every now and then the eyes in it shifted and shone as if to accent his agitation. Once he began to run and then abruptly relapsed into a swaggering slowness and carelessness. Then he did something which Mr. Harker could never have conceived any normal naval officer in His Britannic Majesty's Service doing, even in a lunatic asylum. He drew his sword.

It was at this bursting-point of the prodigy that the two passing figures disappeared behind a headland on the shore. The staring secretary had just time to notice the swarthy stranger, with a resumption of carelessness, knock off a head of sea-holly with his glittering blade. He seemed then to have abandoned all idea of catching the other man up. But Mr. Harold Harker's face became very thoughtful as he stood there ruminating for some time before he gravely took himself inland, towards the road that ran past the gates of the great house and so by a long curve down to the sea.

It was up this curving road from the coast that the Admiral might be expected to come, considering the direction in which he had been walking, and making the natural assumption that he was bound for his own door. The path along the sands under the links turned inland just beyond the headland and, solidifying itself into a road, returned towards Craven House. It was down this road, therefore, that the secretary darted, with characteristic im-

petuosity, to meet his patron returning home.

But the patron was apparently not returning home. What was still more peculiar, the secretary was not returning home either—at least until many hours later—a delay quite long enough to arouse alarm and mystification at Craven House.

Behind the pillars and palms of that rather too palatial country house expectancy g r a d u a l l y changed to uneasiness. Gryce, the butler, a big bilious man abnormally silent below as well as above stairs, showed a certain restlessness as he moved about the main front-hall and occasionally looked out of the side windows of the porch, to the white road that swept towards the sea.

The Admiral's sister, Marian, who kept house for him, had her brother's high nose with a more sniffy expression; she was voluble, rather rambling, not without humour, and capable of sudden emphasis as shrill as a cockatoo.

The Admiral's daughter, Olive, was dark, dreamy, and as a rule abstractedly silent, perhaps melancholy. Her aunt generally conducted most of the conversation, and that without reluctance. But the girl also had a gift of sudden laughter that was very engaging.

"I can't think why they're not here already," said the elder lady. "The postman distinctly told me he'd seen the Admiral coming along the beach, along with that dreadful creature Rook. Why in the world they call him Lieutenant Rook—"

"Perhaps," suggested the melancholy young lady, with a momentary brightness, "perhaps they call him Lieutenant because he is a Lieutenant."

"I can't think why the Admiral keeps him," snorted her aunt, as if she were talking of a housemaid. She was very proud of her brother and always called him The Admiral; but her notions of a commission in the Senior Service were inexact.

"Well, Roger Rook is sulky and unsociable and all that," replied Olive, "but of course that wouldn't prevent him being a capable sailor."

"Sailor!" cried her aunt with one of her rather startling cockatoo notes. "He isn't *my* notion of a sailor. The Lass that Loved a Sailor, as they used to sing when I was young. . . . Just think of it! He's not gay and free and whatsitsname. He doesn't sing chanties or dance a hornpipe."

"Well," observed her niece with gravity, "the Admiral doesn't very often dance a hornpipe."

"Oh, you know what I mean—he isn't bright or breezy or anything," replied the old lady. "Why, that secretary fellow could do better than that."

Olive's rather tragic face was transfigured by one of her good and rejuvenating waves of laughter.

"I'm sure Mr. Harker would dance a hornpipe for you," she said, "and say he had learned it in half an hour from the book of instructions. He's always learning things of that sort."

She stopped laughing suddenly and looked at her aunt's rather strained face.

"I can't think why Mr. Harker doesn't come," she added.

"I don't care about Mr. Harker," replied the aunt, and rose and looked out of the window.

The evening light had long turned from yellow to grey and was now turning almost to white under the widening moonlight, over the large flat landscape by the coast; unbroken by any features save a clump of sea-twisted trees round a pool and beyond, rather gaunt and dark against the horizon, the shabby fishermen's tavern on the shore that bore the name of the Green Man.

And all that road and landscape was empty of any living thing. Nobody had seen the figure in the cocked hat that had been observed earlier in the evening, walking by the sea; or the other and stranger figure that had been seen trailing after him. Nobody had even seen the secretary who saw them.

It was after midnight when the secretary burst in and aroused the household. His face, white as a ghost, looked all the paler against the background of the stolid face and figure of a big Inspector of Police. Somehow that red, heavy, indifferent face looked, even more than the white and harassed one, like a mask of doom.

The news was broken to the two women with such consideration or concealments as were possible. But the news was that the body of Admiral Craven had been fished out of the foul weeds and scum of the pool under the trees—that he was drowned and dead.

Anybody acquainted with Mr. Harold Harker, secretary, will realize that, whatever his agitation, he was by morning in a mood to be tremendously on the spot. He hustled the Inspector, whom he had met the night before on the road down by the Green Man, into another room for private and practical consultation. He questioned the Inspector rather as the Inspector might have questioned a yokel. But Inspector Burns was a stolid character and was either too stupid or too clever to resent such trifles. It soon began to look as if he were by no means so stupid as he looked for he disposed of Harker's eager questions in a manner that was slow but methodical and rational.

"Well," said Harker (his head full of many manuals with titles like "Be a Detective in Ten Days"). "Well, it's the old triangle, I suppose. Accident, suicide or murder."

"I don't see how it could be accident," answered the police-

man. "It wasn't even dark yet and the pool's fifty yards from the straight road that he knew like his own doorstep. He'd no more have got into that pond than he'd go and carefully lie down in a puddle in the street. As for suicide, it's rather a responsibility to suggest it, and rather improbable too. The Admiral was a pretty spry and successful man and frightfully rich, nearly a millionaire in fact; though of course that doesn't prove everything. He seemed to be pretty normal and comfortable in his private life too; he's the last man I should suspect of drowning himself."

"So that we come," said the secretary, lowering his voice with the thrill, "I suppose, to the third possibility."

"We won't be in too much of a hurry about that," said the Inspector, to the annoyance of Harker, who was in a hurry about everything. "But naturally there are one or two things one would like to know. One would like to know about his property, for instance. Do you know who's likely to come in for it? You're his private secretary; do you know anything about his will?"

"I'm not so private a secretary as all that," answered the young man. "His solicitors are Messrs. Willis, Hardman and Dyke, over in Sutton High Street. I believe the will is in their custody."

"Well, I'd better get round and see them pretty soon," said the Inspector.

"Let's get round and see them at once," said the impatient secretary.

He took a turn or two restlessly up and down the room, then exploded in a fresh place.

"What have you done about the body, Inspector?" he asked.

"Dr. Straker is examining it now at the Police Station. His report ought to be ready in an hour or so."

"It can't be ready too soon," said Harker. "It would save time if we could meet him at the lawyer's." Then he stopped and his impetuous tone changed abruptly to one of some embarrassment.

"Look here," he said, "I want . . . we want to consider the young lady, the poor Admiral's daughter, as much as possible just now. She's got a notion that may be all nonsense, but I wouldn't like to disappoint her. There's some friend of hers she wants to consult, staying in the town at present. Man of the name of Brown; priest or parson of some sort. She's given me his address. I don't take much stock in priests or parsons, but—"

The Inspector nodded. "I don't take any stock in priests or parsons but I take a lot of stock in Father Brown," he said. "I happened to have worked with him in a queer sort of society jewel case. He ought to have been a police-

man instead of being a parson."

"Oh, all right," said the breathless secretary as he moved from the room. "Let him come to the lawyer's too."

Thus it happened that, when they hurried across to the neighbouring town to meet Dr. Straker at the solicitor's office, they found Father Brown already seated there, with his hands folded on his heavy umbrella, chatting pleasantly to the only available member of the firm. Dr. Straker also had arrived, but apparently only at that moment, as he was carefully placing his gloves in his top-hat and his top-hat on a side-table. And the mild and beaming expression of the priest's moonlike face and spectacles, together with the silent chuckles of the jolly old grizzled lawyer to whom he was talking, were enough to show that the doctor had not yet mentioned the news of death.

"A beautiful morning after all," Father Brown was saying. "That storm seems to have passed over us. There were some big black clouds but I notice that not a drop of rain fell."

"Not a drop," agreed the solicitor toying with a pen; he was the third partner, Mr. Dyke; "there's not a cloud in the sky now. It's the sort of day for a holiday." Then he noticed the newcomers. "Ah, Mr. Harker, how are you? I hear the Admiral is expected home soon."

Harker spoke, and his voice rang hollow in the room. "I am sorry to say we are the bearers of bad news. Admiral Craven was drowned before reaching home."

There was a change in the very air of the still office, though not in the attitudes of the motionless figures; both were staring at the speaker as if a joke had been frozen on their lips. Both repeated the word "drowned" and looked at each other, and then again at their informant. Then there was a small hubbub of questions.

"When did this happen?" asked the priest.

"Where was he found?" asked the lawyer.

"He was found," said the Inspector, "in that pool by the coast, not far from the Green Man, and dragged out covered with green scum and weeds so as to be almost unrecognizable. But Dr. Straker here has—What is the matter, Father Brown? Are you ill?"

"The Green Man," said Father Brown with a shudder. "I'm so sorry . . . I beg your pardon for being upset."

"Upset by what?" asked the staring officer.

"By his being covered with green scum, I suppose," said the priest, with a rather shaky laugh. Then he added rather more firmly, "I thought it might have been seaweed."

By this time everybody was looking at the priest with a not unnatural suspicion that he was mad; and yet the next crucial sur-

prise was not to come from him. After a dead silence it was the doctor who spoke.

Dr. Straker was a remarkable man, even to look at. He was very tall and angular, formal and professional in his dress yet retaining a fashion that has hardly been known since Mid-Victorian times. Though comparatively young, he wore his brown beard very long and spreading over his waistcoast; in contrast with it, his features, which were both harsh and handsome, looked singularly pale. His good looks were also diminished by something in his deep eyes that was not squinting, but like the shadow of a squint. Everybody noticed these things about him because the moment he spoke he gave forth an indescribable air of authority. But all he said was:

"There is one more thing to be said, if you come to details, about Admiral Craven being drowned." Then he added reflectively, "Admiral Craven was not drowned."

The Inspector turned with quite a new promptitude and shot a question at him.

"I have just examined the body," said Dr. Straker, "the cause of death was a stab through the heart with some pointed blade like a stiletto. It was after death, and even some little time after, that the body was hidden in the pool."

Father Brown was regarding Dr. Straker with a very lively eye, and when the group in the office began to break up he managed to attach himself to the medical man for a little further conversation as they went back down the street. There had not been very much else to detain them except the rather formal question of the will. The impatience of the young secretary had been somewhat tried by the professional etiquette of the old lawyer. But the latter was ultimately induced, rather by the tact of the priest than the authority of the policeman, to refrain from making a mystery where there was no mystery at all. Mr. Dyke admitted with a smile that the Admiral's will was a very normal and ordinary document, leaving everything to his only child Olive, and that there was no reason for concealing the fact.

The doctor and the priest walked slowly down the street that struck out of the town in the direction of Craven House. Harker had plunged on ahead of him with all his native eagerness to get somewhere; but the two behind seemed more interested in their discussion than their direction. It was in rather an enigmatic tone that the tall doctor said to the short cleric beside him:

"Well, Father Brown, what do you think of a thing like this?"

Father Brown looked at him intently for an instant, then said: "Well, I've begun to think of one or two things but my chief difficulty is that I only knew the Admiral slightly."

"The Admiral," said the doctor

with a grim immobility of feature, "was the sort of man of whom it is said that he had not an enemy in the world."

"I suppose you mean," answered the priest, "that there's something else that will not be said."

"Oh, it's no affair of mine," said Straker hastily but rather harshly. "He had his moods. He once threatened me with a legal action about an operation, but thought better of it. I can imagine his being rather rough with a subordinate."

Father Brown's eyes were fixed on the figure of the secretary striding far ahead and as he gazed he realized the cause of his hurry. Some fifty yards farther ahead the Admiral's daughter was dawdling along the road towards the Admiral's house. The secretary soon came abreast of her. For the remainder of the time Father Brown watched the silent drama of two human backs as they diminished into the distance. The secretary was evidently very much excited about something; but if the priest guessed what it was, he kept it to himself. When he came to the corner leading to the doctor's house, he only said briefly:

"I don't know if you have anything more to tell us."

"Why should I?" answered the doctor abruptly; and striding off, left it uncertain whether he was asking why he should have anything to tell or why he should tell it.

Father Brown went stumping on alone in the track of the two young people. But when he came to the entrance to the Admiral's park he was arrested by the action of the girl, who turned suddenly and came straight towards him, her face unusually pale and her eyes bright with some nameless emotion.

"Father Brown," she said in a low voice, "I must talk to you as soon as possible."

"Why certainly," he replied, as coolly as if a gutter-boy had asked him the time. "Where shall we go and talk?"

The girl led him to one of the rather tumbledown arbors in the grounds and they sat down behind a screen of large ragged leaves. She began instantly, as if she must relieve her feelings or faint.

"Harold Harker," she said, "has been talking to me about things. Terrible things."

The priest nodded and the girl went on hastily. "About Roger Rook. Do you know about Roger?"

"I've been told," he answered, "that his fellow seamen call him The Jolly Roger because he is never jolly, and looks like the pirate's skull and crossbones."

"He was not always like that," said Olive in a low voice. "Something very queer must have happened to him. I knew him well when we were children. We used

to play over there on the sands. He was harum-scarum and always talking about being a pirate. I dare say he was the sort they say might take to crime through reading shockers. But there was something poetical in his way of being piratical. He really was a Jolly Roger then. I suppose he was the last boy who kept up the old legend of running away to sea, and at last his family had to agree to his joining the Navy. Well . . ."

"Yes," said Father Brown patiently.

"Well," she admitted, caught in one of her rare moments of mirth. "I suppose poor Roger found it disappointing. Naval officers so seldom carry knives in their teeth or wave bloody cutlasses and black flags. But that doesn't explain the change in him. He just stiffened, grew dull and dumb like a dead man walking about. He always avoids me, but that doesn't matter. I supposed some great grief that's no business of mine had broken him up. And now—well, if what Harold says is true the grief is neither more nor less than going mad or being possessed of a devil."

"And what does Harold say?" asked the priest.

"It's so awful I can hardly say it," she answered. "He swears he saw Roger creeping behind my father that night; hesitating and then drawing his sword. And the doctor says father was stabbed with a steel point. I *can't* believe Roger Rook had anything to do with it. His sulks and my father's temper sometimes led to quarrels. But what are quarrels? I can't exactly say I'm standing up for an old friend because he isn't even friendly. But you can't help feeling sure of some things, even about an old acquaintance. And yet Harold swears that he—"

"Harold seems to swear a great deal," said Father Brown.

There was a sudden silence, after which she said in a different tone: "Well, he does swear other things too. Harold Harker proposed to me just now."

"Am I to congratulate him?" inquired her companion.

"I told him he must wait. But he isn't good at waiting." She was caught again in a ripple of her incongruous sense of the comic. "He said I was his ideal and his ambition and so on. He has lived in the States but somehow I never remember it when he is talking about dollars, only when he is talking about ideals."

"And I suppose," said Father Brown very softly, "that it is because you have to decide about Harold that you want to know the truth about Roger?"

She stiffened and frowned, then equally abruptly smiled, saying: "Oh, you know too much."

"I know very little, especially in this affair," said the priest gravely. "I only know who murdered your father." She started and stood staring at him, stricken

white. Father Brown made a wry face as he went on. "I made a fool of myself when I first realized it, when they'd just been asking where he was found, and went on talking about green scum and the Green Man."

He rose, clutching his clumsy umbrella with a new resolution, he addressed the girl with a new gravity.

"There is something else that I know, which is the key to all these riddles of yours. But I won't tell you yet. I suppose it's bad news, but it's nothing like so bad as the things you have been facing." He buttoned up his coat and turned towards the gate. "I'm going to see this Mr. Rook of yours, in a shed by the shore, near where Mr. Harker saw him walking. I rather think he lives there." And he went bustling off in the direction of the beach.

Olive was an imaginative person; perhaps too imaginative to be safely left to brood over such hints as her friend had thrown out. But he was in a hurry to find the best relief for her broodings. The mysterious connection between Father Brown's first shock of enlightenment and the chance language about the pool and the inn hag-rode her fancy in a hundred forms of ugly symbolism.

The Green Man became a ghost trailing loathesome weeds and walking the countryside under the moon; the sign of the Green Man became a human figure hanging as from a gibbet; and the lake itself became a tavern, a dark subaqueous tavern for the dead sailors. And yet he had taken the most rapid method to overthrow all such nightmares, with a burst of blinding daylight which seemed more mysterious than the night.

For before the sun had set something had come back into her life that turned her whole world topsy-turvy once more; something she had hardly known that she desired until it was abruptly granted; something that was, like a dream, old and familiar, yet remained incomprehensible and incredible. For Roger Rook had come striding across the sands, and even when he was a dot in the distance she knew he was transfigured. And as he came nearer and nearer she saw that his dark face was alive with laughter and exultation. He came straight towards her as if they had never parted, and seized her shoulders saying:

"Now I can look after you, thank God."

She hardly knew what she answered, but she heard herself questioning rather wildly why he seemed so changed and so happy.

"I am happy," he answered, "Because I have heard the bad news."

All parties concerned, including some who seemed rather unconcerned, found themselves assembled on the garden path lead-

ing to Craven House, to hear the formality, now truly formal, of the lawyer's reading of the will; and the probable and more practical sequel of the lawyer's advice upon the crisis. Besides the grey-haired solicitor himself, armed with the testamentary document, there was the Inspector armed with more direct authority touching the crime, and Lieutenant Rook in undisguised attendance on the lady. Some were rather mystified on seeing the tall figure of the doctor. Some smiled a little on seeing the dumpy figure of the priest. Mr. Harker, that Flying Mercury, had shot down to the lodge-gates to meet them, led them back onto the lawn, then dashed ahead of them again to prepare their reception. He said he would be back in a jiffy and anyone observing his piston-rod energy could well believe it; but for the moment they were left rather stranded on the lawn outside the house.

"Reminds me of somebody making runs at cricket," said the Lieutenant.

"That young man," said the lawyer, "is rather annoyed that the law cannot move quite so quickly as he does. Fortunately Miss Craven understands our professional difficulties and delays. She has kindly assured me that she still has confidence in my slowness."

"I wish," said the doctor suddenly, "that I had as much confidence in his quickness."

"Why, what do you mean?" asked Rook, knitting his brows. "Do you mean that Harker is too quick?"

"Too quick and too slow," said Dr. Straker in his rather cryptic fashion. "I know one occasion at least when he was not so very quick. Why was he hanging about half the night by the pond and the Green Man before the Inspector came down and found the body? Why did he meet the Inspector? Why should he expect to meet the Inspector outside the Green Man?"

"I don't understand you," said Rook. "Do you mean that Harker wasn't telling the truth?"

Dr. Straker was silent. The grizzled lawyer laughed with grim good humour.

"I have nothing more serious to say against the young man," he said, "than that he made a prompt and praiseworthy attempt to teach me my own business."

"For that matter, he made an attempt to teach me mine," said the Inspector, who had just joined the group in front. "But that doesn't matter. If Dr. Straker means anything by his hints, they do matter. I must ask you to speak plainly, doctor. It may be my duty to question him at once."

"Well, here he comes," said Rook as the alert figure of the secretary appeared once more in the doorway.

At this point Father Brown, who had remained silent and inconspicuous at the tail of the procession, astonished everybody very much; perhaps especially those who knew him. He not only walked rapidly to the front but turned, facing the whole group with an arresting and almost threatening expression, like a sergeant bringing soldiers to the halt.

"Stop!" he said sternly. "I apologize to everybody, but it's absolutely necessary that I should see Mr. Harker first. I've got to tell him something I know, and I don't think anybody else knows; something he's got to hear. It may save a very tragic misunderstanding with somebody later on."

"What on earth do you mean?" asked old Dyke the lawyer.

"I mean the bad news," said Father Brown.

"Here, I say," began the Inspector indignantly. Then suddenly he caught the priest's eye and remembered strange things he had seen in other days. "Well, if it were anyone in the world but you, I should say of all the infernal cheek—"

But Father Brown was already out of hearing and a moment afterwards was plunged in talk with Harker on the porch. They walked to and fro together for a few paces, then disappeared into the dark interior. It was about twelve minutes afterwards that Father Brown came out alone.

To their surprise he showed no disposition to re-enter the house, now that the whole company were at last about to enter it. He threw himself down on the rather rickety seat in the leafy arbor, and as the procession disappeared through the doorway, lit a pipe and proceeded to stare vacantly at the long ragged leaves about his head and to listen to the birds. There was no man who had a more hearty and enduring appetite for doing nothing . . .

He was apparently in a cloud of smoke and a dream of abstraction when the front-doors were once more flung open and two or three figures came out helter-skelter, running towards him, the daughter of the house and her young admirer Mr. Rook being easily winners in the race. Their faces were alight with astonishment and the face of Inspector Burns, who advanced more heavily behind them, like an elephant shaking the garden, was inflamed with some indignation as well

"What *can* all this mean?" cried Olive, as she came panting to a halt. "He's gone!"

"Bolted!" said the Lieutenant explosively. "Harker's just managed to pack a suitcase and bolted! Gone clean out of the back door and over the garden wall to God knows where. What *did* you say to him?"

"Don't be silly!" said Olive, with a worried expression. "Of course you told him you'd found him out, and now he's gone. I

never could have believed he was wicked like that!"

"Well!" gasped the Inspector, bursting into their midst. "What have you done now? What have you let me down like this for?"

"Well," repeated Father Brown, "what have I done?"

"You have let a murderer escape," cried Burns, with a decision that was like a thunderclap in the quiet garden. "You have *helped* a murderer to escape. Like a fool I let you warn him, and now he is miles away."

"I have helped a few murderers in my time, it is true," said Father Brown; then he added, in a careful distinction, "not, you will understand, helped them to commit the murder."

"But you knew all the time," insisted Olive. "You guessed from the first that it must be he. That's what you meant about being upset by the business of finding the body. That's what the doctor meant by saying my father might be disliked by a subordinate."

"That's what I complain of," said the official indignantly. "You knew even then that he was the one who—"

"You knew even then," insisted Olive, "that the murderer was—"

Father Brown nodded gravely. "Yes," he said. "I knew even then that the murderer was old Dyke."

"Was *who?*" repeated the Inspector and stopped amid a dead silence, punctuated only by the occasional pipe of birds.

"I mean Mr. Dyke, the solicitor," said Father Brown, like one explaining something elementary to an infant class. "That gentleman with grey hair who's supposed to read the will."

They all stood like statues staring at him, as he carefully filled his pipe again and struck a match. At last Burns rallied his vocal powers to break the strangling silence with an effort resembling violence.

"But, in the name of heaven, *why?*"

"Ah, why?" said the priest and rose thoughtfully, puffing at his pipe. "As to why he did it . . . Well, I suppose the time has come to tell you, or those of you who don't know, the fact that is the key of all this business. It's a great calamity and it's a great crime, but it's not the murder of Admiral Craven."

He looked Olive full in the face and said very seriously:

"I tell you the bad news bluntly and in few words because I think you are brave enough and perhaps happy enough to take it well. You have the chance, and I think the power, to be a great woman. You are not a great heiress."

Amid the silence that followed it was he who resumed his explanation.

"Most of your father's money, I am sorry to say, is gone. It went by the financial dexterity of

the grey-haired gentleman named Dyke, who is, I grieve to say, a swindler. Admiral Craven was murdered to silence him about the way in which he was swindled. The fact that he was ruined and you were disinherited is the single simple clue, not only to the murder, but to all the other mysteries in this business." He took a puff or two and then continued. "I told Mr. Rook you were disinherited and he rushed back to help you. Mr. Rook is a rather remarkable person."

"Oh, chuck it," said Mr. Rook with a hostile air.

"Mr. Rook is a monster," said Father Brown with scientific calm. "He is an anachronism, an atavism, a brutal survival of the Stone Age. If there was one barbarous superstitution we all supposed to be utterly extinct and dead in these days it was that notion about honour and independence. But then I get mixed up with so many dead superstitions. Mr. Rook is an extinct animal. He is a plesiosaurus. He did not want to live on his wife or have a wife who could call him a fortune-hunter. Therefore he sulked in a grotesque manner and only came to life again when I brought him the good news that you were ruined. He wanted to work for his wife and not be kept by her. Disgusting, isn't it? Let us turn to the brighter topic of Mr. Harker.

"I told Mr. Harker you were disinherited and he rushed away in a sort of panic. Do not be too hard on Mr. Harker. He really had better as well as worse enthusiasms. But he had them all mixed up. There is no harm in having ambitions, but he had ambitions and called them ideals. The old sense of honour taught men to suspect success to say, 'This is a benefit; it may be a bribe.' The new nine-times-accursed nonsense about Making Good teaches men to identify being good with making money.

"That was all that was the matter with him; in every other way he was a thoroughly good fellow, and there are thousands like him. Gazing at the stars and rising in the world were all Uplift. Marrying a good wife and marrying a rich wife were all Making Good. But he was not a cynical scoundrel or he would simply have come back and jilted or cut you as the case might be. He could not face you for while you were there, half of his broken ideal was left.

"I did not tell the Admiral, but somebody did. Word came to him somehow during the last grand parade on board ship, that his friend, the family lawyer, had betrayed him. He was in such a towering passion that he did what he could never have done in his senses; came straight on shore in his cocked hat and gold lace to catch the criminal.

"He wired to the police station

and that was why the Inspector was wandering round the Green Man. Lieutenant Rook followed him on shore because he suspected some family trouble and had half a hope he might help and put himself right. Hence his hesitating behavior.

"As for drawing his sword when he dropped behind and thought he was alone, well that's a matter of imagination. He was a romantic person who had dreamed of swords and run away to sea; and found himself in a service where he wasn't even allowed to wear a sword except about once in three years. He thought he was quite alone on the sands where he played as a boy. If you don't understand what he did, I can only say, like Stevenson, 'you will never be a pirate.' Also you will never be a poet; and you have never been a boy."

"I never have," answered Olive gravely, "and yet I think I understand."

"Almost every man," continued the priest musing, "will play with anything shaped like a sword or dagger, even if it is a paper-knife. That is why I thought it so odd when the lawyer didn't."

"What do you mean?" asked Burns. "didn't what?"

"Why, didn't you notice," answered Brown, "at the first meeting in the office, the lawyer played with a pen and not with a paper-knife; though he had a beautiful bright steel paper-knife in the pattern of a stiletto? The pens were dusty and splashed with ink. The knife had just been cleaned, but he did not play with it. There are limits to the irony of assassins."

After a silence the Inspector said, like one waking from a dream: "Look here . . . I don't know whether I'm on my head or my heels; I don't know whether you think you've got to the end, but I haven't got to the beginning. Where do you get all this lawyer stuff from? What started you out on that trail?"

Father Brown laughed without mirth.

"The murderer made a slip at the start," he said, "and I can't think why nobody else noticed it. When you brought the first news of the death to the solicitor's office nobody was supposed to know anything there, except that the Admiral was expected home. When you said he was drowned, I asked when it happened and Mr. Dyke asked where the corpse was found."

He paused a moment to knock out his pipe and resumed reflectively: "Now when you are simply told of a seaman, returning from the sea, that he has been drowned, it is natural to assume that he has been drowned at sea. At any rate, to allow that he may have been drowned at sea. If he had been washed overboard or gone down with his ship or had his body 'committed to the deep,'

there would be no reason to expect his body to be found at all.

"The moment that man asked where it was found, I was sure he knew where it was found. Because he had put it there. Nobody but the murderer need have thought of anything so unlikely as a seaman being drowned in a land-locked pool a few hundred yards from the sea. That is why I suddenly felt sick and turned green, I dare say; as green as the Green Man. I never *can* get used to finding myself suddenly sitting beside a murderer. So I had to turn it off by talking in parables; but the parable meant something, after all. I said that the body was covered with green scum, but it might just as well have been seaweed."

It is fortunate that tragedy can never kill comedy and that the two can run side by side. For while the only acting partner of the business of Willis, Hardman and Dyke blew his brains out when the Inspector entered the house to arrest him, Olive and Roger were calling to each other across the sands at evening, as they did when they were children together.

---

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# the moon for a nickel

*by . . . Fredric Brown*

**There's more than one way to make money. The little telescope man had to make it the real hard way.**

IT WAS ALMOST midnight but the lake front still sweltered in the aftermath of a blazing midsummer day.

The little man with the straggly gray hair stood dejectedly beside his big black skyward-aimed telescope, upon which hung a hand-lettered sign, THE MOON FOR A NICKEL.

It was too hot to look at the moon. Business was bad.

Over the rippling waters of Lake Michigan the moon hung like a golden ball, but no one seemed interested in that either. Beyond the park tall buildings rose, black gaunt shapes against an inky background. Here and there shone the white rectangle of a lighted window.

A hand touched his shoulder and the little man jumped. He had not heard any one approach.

A man with a black slouch hat pulled down over his forehead stood beside him. He was holding out a dollar bill. "Take a walk around a tree, dad," he said. "I want to look at the Big Dipper."

The little man stuck the dollar into his pocket. A buck was a buck and it was a dull night. He walked over to the edge of the

*And there's more than one viewpoint to every story, with as much drama in the life of the innocent bystander, sometimes, as there is in the tragedy he may be quietly watching from the sidelines . . . A very short story by Fred Brown, brilliant author of that remarkable novel,* THE PICKLED PUNKS.

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park and sat down on a bench, just near enough to see that the fellow didn't try to walk off with the 'scope.

Not that he could do much about it if the guy wanted to get tough. He was a big bruiser. Thinking about it, the little man became quite uneasy. It wasn't usual to be handed a dollar and told to take a walk. In fact, it had never happened before. But a buck was a buck, and if only he had forty-nine more of them . . .

Out of the corner of his eye he watched the man at his telescope.

The stranger swiveled the telescope around so that it seemed to be pointing up at the nearest building, across the street from the park. He kept turning the focusing screw. At last he seemed satisfied with the adjustment and moved the telescope slowly from side to side as though he were peering intently into every window in the building. Then he raised it a trifle and peered into the windows of the floor above. Then the floor below.

Then he took out his handkerchief, mopped his forehead, and before putting it back into his pocket, he waved it once. Then he turned the telescope around again so that it pointed out over the lake, and without a word, he walked rapidly away.

The little man with the straggly gray hair strolled back to his telescope. But his eyes followed the stranger as he crossed the two blocks of park.

Then, on the opposite side of the park he climbed into the front seat of a big car parked at the curb.

But the car didn't drive away. It stayed there, with the man inside it, waiting.

The little man lost interest then. His thoughts went back to his own troubles . . . his wife so ill, needing an operation and counting on him, somehow, to find the money. But fifty bucks was as far away as the moon . . .

He might as well go home. Nobody out tonight, in all this heat. The dollar bill had been a windfall, but just enough to be tantalizing. Only forty-nine more of them would pay for his wife's operation. Her wan face seemed to swim before his eyes, superimposed upon the blurred disk of the moon. He'd wait a little longer.

The moon . . . he should re-aim his 'scope at the moon, so that in case anybody with a nickel came along he'd be ready. He looked through the telescope, saw a blurred golden disk. He reached up to turn the focusing screw and then lowered his hand.

He was about to move the 'scope when a flash of light caught his eye, on the sixth floor, where the telescope was aimed. A light that glowed and disappeared, showed once more, dimly. A flashlight, he thought. He peered

through the big eye, saw nothing but blackness. Several minutes passed. He kept his gaze on the building, a sudden feeling of curiosity overcoming his lethargy.

Then, out of the dark entrance of the building, two men walked, went rapidly to the parked car where the big guy sat, waiting. One carried a small bag.

Curiosity overcame caution in the little man beside the telescope. He swung the telescope around, gave the focusing screw a slight twist with a practiced hand, aimed at the car. And the distant scene leaped suddenly into view as though it were only a few yards away.

The men were climbing into the car. They looked tough. One had a jagged white scar just above his collar, a long thin nose and little ratty eyes. The other man, who was getting in beside the driver, had a fat pudgy face.

He got ready to swing the telescope to follow the car. He wouldn't be able to catch the license plates until it had moved almost a block.

He saw the man who used the telescope start the car. It seemed so close that he was surprised not to be able to hear the sound of the motor.

Then the driver turned, looked out over the park, toward the lake, toward the telescope. The little man could see his lips moving in what seemed to be silent curses. He pointed toward the telescope, said something to the other two men.

The car made a U-turn on the boulevard and headed toward the drive crossing the park. It was coming toward the man with the telescope!

For a moment he stood petrified as the car roared down the straight stretch toward him. Then he turned, began to run blindly out across the grass, away from the drive.

Breaks screeched. A gun barked and a bullet buzzed past his left ear like an angry hornet.

Two automatics were barking now. But the light was uncertain, and he had presence of mind enough to zig-zag as he ran.

Then another sound, a welcome sound, came to his ears—the sirens of police squad cars. They seemed to come from three directions, converging upon the park. The automatics stopped barking. The big black car roared, swerved—but a squad car blocked its way.

The windshield shattered, and the car came to a stop with squealing brakes. A second squad car pulled up behind it. Two detectives from the third car were running toward it across the grass, one of them carrying a submachine gun.

A salvo from the big car sent the cop with the machine gun flat on his belly. He started firing from that position. The staccato of his gun drowned out the short

sharp barks of the pistols. A row of holes appeared in the side of the big car.

The automatics were silent again. Then a pair of hands showed white against the police car lights as one of the men in the car raised his arms, kicked open the door to climb out. But he fell out instead, and sprawled in a pool of blood on the asphalt.

In the silence that followed, the little man with the straggly gray hair walked over to the detective who had fired the submachine gun.

"I can identify them," he said.

"So can I," said the detective, with a grin. "Now."

"I mean," said the little man, "that I saw the robbery happen." And he went on and told how his telescope had been used, the whole story. "Is there," he asked, "any chance of my getting a reward?"

"What for?" asged the detective. "You're lucky we don't run you in as an accessory, allowing your spyglass to be used by a lookout in a burglary."

The little man winced, and the detective grinned, patted his arm.

"Naw," he added. "They set off an alarm as they were leaving. You delayed them, though."

The police ambulance roared up, and the three bodies were loaded into it. A cop got into the riddled car and found that it could be driven in under its own power.

The little man walked dispiritedly back to his telescope. A crowd had gathered. The shooting had drawn away from wherever they'd been a few minutes ago, a mob of the curious who always gather at the scene of an accident or crime in a city, whether it be noon or midnight. There were hundreds milling about, excited, oblivious of the heat, for the moment.

The little man perked up. Crowds meant business.

Idly he turned to look back toward the building across the boulevard. The looted shop was brightly lighted now. He focused the telescope on the windows. As if he were feet away he saw the policemen, the detectives, going over the place. Back against the wall he could see a damaged safe. A man came in who looked like the owner; he bent over the safe, the desk.

The little man had a big idea.

"See the scene of the crime!" he called. "Half a dollar to see the scene of the crime through the telescope!"

Some one shoved a half dollar into his hand and looked through the telescope. Then another, and another. A knot gathered about the telescope. The little man beamed and began to get heavy about the pockets. He hadn't known that there *were* that many half dollars.

Hours later he finally went home, trudging happily through the hot night, sixty-one dollars jingling in his pockets.

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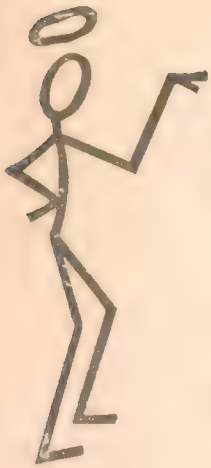

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# death in a nudist camp

*by . . . Jimmy Rizutto*

**Two deaths and no connection between them — until Shamus Lancing played sitting duck.**

THE COLD, WHITE LIGHT of early morning seeped through my burning eyelids. I closed them tight again, lay there waiting for the pain in my head to let up. It didn't. It got worse. I ran a furred tongue over dry lips, cursed drink, drinkers, a buxom blonde named Rita and all-night parties.

Then I cursed the telephone. But its incessant jangling won out over my hangover. I staggered to my feet, made it to the diminutive hallway and the arrogant phone. "Yeh. Who is it?"

"Mr. Lancing?"

"Yeh. Yeh. Who is it?"

"This is the Sun Nudist Club."

Take a fast-living, hard-drinking private eye—an egotistical sleuth with an eye for the women—mention organized nudity on a large scale and you get his immediate attention.

"What can I do for you?"

"Was your partner Jack Welch?"

"I have a partner—present tense—not past," I said. "And his name is Jack Welch."

"Mr. Lancing, I'm afraid it's past. Jack Welch is dead, murdered."

---

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---

That did it. The drumming in my head stopped. I felt as alert as if I had just hit a cold shower. "When? How?" I snapped into the phone.

"Acton Drive, Ocean Boulevard, North Miami Beach. You'll see the sign on the side of the road—the Sun Nudist Club."

I dressed in nothing flat, downed a straight Scotch, grabbed a cab and headed for Acton Drive.

The straight shot on an empty stomach had my head as clear as a bell by the time the cab pulled up in front of a sign, bold in foot-high lettering, proclaiming The Sun Nudist Club. I paid the driver and walked toward the low, rambling building.

A wide, white veranda encircled the building, cosy with an occasional low-slung easy-chair. Glass doors opened onto the veranda, slick with foot long chrome handles. I swung through, stopped just inside. I heard vague scurryings somewhere in the gloom of a vast room.

"Yes? Whom do you wish?" It was a female voice, throaty, sultry. It came from behind me. When I swung around I saw that the body fit the voice. She was as blonde as a Scandinavian goddess. Green eyes watched me lazily from behind long, mascared lashes.

I introduced myself.

The red lips smiled then. The sultry voice purred, "I'm so glad you're here! It's a terrible thing!"

I said, "Where is he?"

"This way. In Mr. Alleth's office. He called for the police and an ambulance."

Mr. Alleth was short, fat. White hair bristled in a crew-cut; brown eyes twinkled in a mahogany-tanned face. Vertical smile lines ran to a humorous sensual mouth. He wore khaki shirt, shorts.

"I'm glad you came, Mr. Lancing," he said. "It's terrible! Shocking!"

"Where is he?" I said.

He led the way back through hygienic corridors, lounging rooms, billiard rooms, writing rooms.

Jack lay face down beside the swimming pool, sprawled grotesquely on a foam rubber mat. He was quite dead. He was naked. And where the back of his head should have been there was a gaping hole. Blood had spilled onto his broad, sun-tanned shoulders, soaked into the mat beneath him. The cause of death was obvious—heavy slugs smashing into the back of his head as he lay face down, sun-bathing. What the hell, I wondered, was he doing in a nudist joint?

I motioned to Alleth and we went back to the house.

"All right. Before the police arrive, give me all you know about Jack."

Alleth said, "Jack Welch has been a member of our club for three months. He joined through the sponsorship of Miss Lana Toy. She has been with us about six

months. They both seemed like nice people so my wife and I gave them the requested membership." His voice was precise, clipped, and he looked like a solid citizen.

"Okay," I said. "Now—who is Miss Lana Toy?"

"We know Miss Toy through her interest in nudism." He stopped as if that explained everything.

"That's fine. Now, do you mind telling me how you met her—in other words, who is Miss Lana Toy?"

He looked at me arrogantly. "My dear fellow—" he began.

I stopped him. "My partner has been murdered, Mr. Alleth. I'm going to find his killer if I have to tear the town apart—beginning with your joint. Are you with me or against me?"

That impressed him. He opened up profusely. I listened to the reasons for his approval of Miss Toy. She had, it seems, been a contributor to the magazine, *The Nudist,* for several years, writing articles on diet, exercise, nudism. Okay. It answered my question.

I said, "Where can I find Lana Toy?"

"Campbell Street." He gave me a number. "It's a fruit shop. She and her father live above it and he runs the shop."

Campbell Street was in a dingy part of town. I took a cab ride across town. Toy's was a little fruit and vegetable shop squashed between two elegantly fronted Chinese restaurants.

I walked in. Standing behind a mound of fly-specked apples was a dried-up Oriental weighing not more than eighty-four pounds.

"Mr. Toy?"

He grinned chummily. "Yes. What can I do?" His voice was as thin as his body, sing-song and squeaky.

"My name's Art Lancing. I'd like a word with your daughter, Lana. Is she here?"

He nodded. The grin had disappeared, leaving his yellow face as expressionless as a Buddhist god.

"Okay. Can I see her?"

He motioned me toward the rear of the shop, hustled along ahead of me on shuffling, sandaled feet. We went through bead curtains, into a small much-lived-in living-room. He said, "'Scuse, please," just like a Charlie Chan character and vanished through more bead curtains.

I shoved my hat to the back of my head, tried to peer through bead curtains, saw only more bead curtains, shrugged and sat down.

Waiting for Miss Toy I thought about Jack . . . Jack Welch and I had teamed up after the war, opened our own detective agency. He'd been in the army, I'd seen three war years in the navy. From the beginning we had done a booming business. Lately, we'd been having to turn down at least two-thirds of the jobs offered us.

Our bank deposit was now in lovely round figures. Jack and I had got along fine, dividing the jobs—and the money—fifty-fifty between us. Now this . . .

I was anxious to meet Miss Lana Toy. I'd never heard him mention her. And he'd never mentioned the nudist club to me either.

He'd been on a case involving a gang killing, or what seemed to be a gang killing. Nick Brazzi had disappeared, his brother Enrico had retained us to find Nick or find out what had happened to him. The Brazzis ran a gambling joint. Jack had taken on the case. Whether or not the case was tied up with the nudist joint and a Chinese girl was something I needed to find out.

I smoked and stared at bead curtains, stared at bead curtains and smoked. No Mr. Toy. No Lana. Just as I was about to invade that bead curtain it parted and in came an agitated Mr. Toy. Behind him was a girl.

"Mr. Lancing . . . My daughter, Lana."

I drew a deep breath but held back the whistle. Mr. Toy's daughter Lana was a doll-sized piece of luscious womanhood. Her skin was silk-smooth, almond-colored. Tilted slits revealed coal-black eyes, mischief and hilarity twinkling in their depths. A small pert nose poised lightly above a dimpled chin. Between the two was a dark red, pouting mouth. She wore a skin-tight Chinese dress with high collar and a slit skirt revealing smooth, brown legs.

I managed a polite, "How do you do, Miss Toy?"

When she spoke her voice bubbled forth like the low gurgle of rich red wine.

"How do you do, Mr. Lancing?" she said.

I turned to the old man. "Mr. Toy, may I speak to your daughter alone for a few minutes?"

He bowed, nodded and made a shuffling exit back to his fly-specked apples.

Abruptly but gently I told her about Jack. I watched her closely as I spoke. She looked too clean and young to be mixed up in murder. And I found I didn't want to find that she was in on it. But I was out to get Jack's killer —that came first, after all.

But her reaction convinced me that the news I'd given her was new and shocking. She went into a faint and I ran for her old man. Briefly I told him what had happened. "Give her a drink, pop. She's had a shock. I'll see you later."

## II

I decided to pay Enrico Brazzi a business call next. Jack and I rarely discussed our cases until they were closed, our theory being the fewer in on the deal the less chance there'll be of leaking information. So I didn't know how far he'd got on the Brazzi job.

Brazzi's is a shiny black rectangular room with maybe a dozen green-topped tables for dice, a couple of roulette tables and a couple of bird cages. There's a lush bar, ebony black against one wall with pink-tinted mirrors throwing back flattering reflections. At ten-thirty in the morning it was deserted. My heels made a clattering on the tile floor. I yelled for Enrico, drew a little guy with his tools of trade, a mop and a bucket, hanging from a limp hand. He said he was alone in the joint.

I knew where Brazzi lived. The street in front of the place was deserted but, miraculously, a cab materialized from one of the side streets. I flagged him down, climbed in and directed him to Enrico Brazzi's apartment.

Castle Apartments was smoothly modernistic. My pressure on the doorbell was answered by a svelte blonde in a clinging green house coat.

"Tell Enrico Art Lancing is here." That got me in.

The blonde disappeared through a half-open door, closed it behind her. I mooched around the large room. Atop a small cocktail bar was a colorful print of the Madonna of Torre Annuziata.

" 'Lo, Art. You want me?"

Enrico Brazzi stood in the bedroom door; the blonde peered at me around his husky, robe-clad shoulder. Enrico was big and corpulent, had a swarthy complexion, jet black, well-trimmed hair, brown eyes, hard and glittering. A small black moustache adorned his fleshy upper lip.

"I thought you might want to see me," I said.

His eyes never left mine. "I thought your partner was handling my job," he said.

I finished lighting my cigarette. I thought about Jack lying cold and dead in that nudist joint. And Lana Toy . . .

Finally I spoke. "He was, Enrico. But I'm taking over now. Jack's dead."

The startled look that jumped into his eyes was the McCoy. "You kiddin'?" he said hoarsely.

"He was murdered this morning. I've just seen him. He was shot through the back of the head three times."

He walked over to the bar, grabbed up a Scotch bottle and tossed off a straight whiskey. No doubt about it, he was scared. His brother disappearing, in all probability dead. The private eye he had hired to find him, murdered after only a few days on the case.

But his face was expressionless when he faced me again. "You going to start in where Jack left off, or shall I get myself another boy?"

"The agency made a deal. I'll stay with it. I'm letting the cops look for Jack's killer. I'll go after your brother Nick."

"You think there's a connection?"

"Between your brother's disappearance and my partner's murder?"

"Yeah."

I shrugged. "Maybe. Maybe not. We're in a tough business; we've got a lot of friends, more enemies."

The girl hadn't moved from the doorway of the bedroom. Her eyes never left Brazzi's face.

Brazzi became brisk. "Okay, you take over my job. Sorry about Jack. Let me know if I can do anything for you." He crossed the room and opened the door for me.

I went to our office. Small, compact, economical with a neatly tagged door labeled: *Arthur Lancing. Jack Welch. Investigations.*

I went in. Joan, our secretary, was crying.

"You heard about it," I said.

She nodded, dabbed at her eyes with a wisp of handkerchief.

"Cops call you?"

Again she nodded. Then she crossed her arms on the desk, dropped her head on them and really let go.

Poor kid, she had always carried the torch for Jack. I got some ice water from the cooler and bathed her face.

"Pull yourself together, kid," I said gently. "We got work to do."

It was lunch time. I took her around to Heublein's and ordered two Spanish omelettes, some brandy to precede it.

She gulped down raw brandy and the color came back to her face. Joan had a nice, heart-shaped little face, slightly pouting lips that fitted the rest of it. She nibbled her omelette while I told her about my morning, omitting the gory details of the way Jack looked, sprawled naked and dead in that nudist joint.

Then I took her home in a cab. Sitting in the rear seat I ruminated over affairs. They were not bright. I doubted if I could keep the business going on my own. I didn't turn handsprings at the thought of taking on another partner. Nobody could substitute for Jack. I worried about the Brazzi business.

"Sorry to mention it, Joan," I said, "but did Jack leave notes on the Nick Brazzi case?"

She nodded. "I'm typing them up now. They're in my desk drawer."

"Swell. I'll brief through it when I get back."

I dropped her at her place, then went back to the office. I rustled through Jack's hastily scrawled notes. There was a lot of routine stuff, mostly for expense purposes later. There were the names of about a dozen characters with a small check beside each name. I didn't recognize many of them, a couple maybe. Beside the name, *Phillips, Henry,* there was a check and a large question mark. Nothing else.

There was no mention of nudist clubs. There were the names of a dozen gambling spots

with no checks against them, a dozen more with checks and brief comments scribbled after each. *Pontoon Stud Poker. Worth closer check. Doris. Hat girl?* Squeezed in at the bottom of the page, as if it were an afterthought, was the cryptic comment: *Ring Lana.* It was the only reference to her. But it made me decide to see her again. Maybe she'd recall something useful after she got over the shock.

I decided to follow up Jack's line of investigation—the gambling spots. I figured it the way he did: that Nick Brazzi's disappearance was caused by friction between gamblers. Maybe somewhere along the line the Brazzi brothers had gotten in the hair of another gambling combine. Result: elimination of Nick to scare Enrico out of business.

While waiting for the night joints to open I decided to call on Lana Toy again.

The dingy fruitshop was dark, the doors locked. I knocked, rattled the shutter-door, waited. No light appeared. I looked at my watch. It was three minutes after six. Maybe the old man didn't keep his shop open evenings, although everything else in the block was open. I decided to use my skeleton keys.

The third key did it. I eased open the solidly timbered door, closed it silently behind me. I went through tinkling bead curtains, into the room in back of the shop. I stopped just inside the door, one hand groping for a light switch.

The sound that came out of the blackness made my hand retract from the wall, sent it groping under my left armpit. It encountered shirt, linen smooth, slightly damp. But no gun. I cursed myself mentally. Getting up in my foggy state that morning I'd rushed out without my gun.

The rustling of bead curtains came again.

I said, "All right. I've got you covered. Where's the light switch?"

Silence, heavy and menacing.

I began to feel a cold streak crawl up my neck, making the hair stiffen. I started moving back, placing each foot carefully, holding my breath. I'd get out of that open doorway, at least . . .

Then the silence dissipated into a clatter of lumbering steps, fierce breathing, slum oaths . . .

III

I backed to the wall. A shadow slipped momentarily over the window light. I felt pain as knuckles with metal covers cracked against my chin. I lurched out into the room. I could see him now. He was big, big and dangerous. I aimed below the belt, swung in a short upward stab, putting my weight behind it, pirouetting in a half circle to carry me out of danger.

I was rewarded with a tearing gasp of pain. I felt down low with

my left hand. Waist high from the ground my fingers encountered an oily, slick mass of hair. I gave him a vicious chopping blow with the edge of my stiffened palm across the back of his neck. He fell forward, limp as a week-old fish.

I moved around him, resumed my groping for the light switch. I found it. As light flooded the room I looked down on a giant of a man, over six feet, built like a Samson. He was out cold. Brass kunckles gleamed on his right hand.

A boulder-like jaw hung loosely, beetling brows were screwed down on minute eye sockets. An unlovely character. What in hell was he doing here?

I walked into the next room, a storeroom. Stairs led up from one corner. I climbed them. I struck blackness again, went through the hunt for a light switch again, found it. But before I could press it I got light of another kind. I got a galaxy of celestial incandescence, a kaleidoscope of brilliant colors that went round and round in my head . . .

Then I was falling, swirling . . .

I opened my eyes to blackness tinged with the fire of pain. I moved slowly, clawing at an invisible wall, fighting to stand. I went down the stairs one step at a time. The big guy was missing from the middle of the living-room floor.

I needed a drink badly. I began a feverish search for Poppa Toy's whisky, found it eventually hidden away behind tins of bamboo shoots in the store room. I pulled out the cork, stuck the bottle between my teeth, threw back my head. A lump the size of a cricket ball was rising on the back of my skull. It throbbed with all the recurrent insistence of a boogie theme.

I went upstairs again. There were bedrooms, a slick modern bathroom. They were neat and orderly, in contrast to the cluttered living-room downstairs.

In one of the rooms the bed was slightly rumpled. A small mound was visible beneath the coverlet. I lifted one corner of it, flicked it back. My throat went tight. My stomach ridged. I passed my hand over my eyes, then lifted the sheet for another look.

Poppa Toy lay cramped, rigid, with only half a face. Two like that in one day was too much for me. I swung around, ran out of the room, down the stairs.

I'd let the police take care of this one. I went into a bar down at the corner, found the phone booth, asked for Detective Craven. I was lucky; he was in.

"Lancing. Art Lancing," I said.

"I've been looking for you," he said. "About your partner—"

I broke in on him. "There's been another killing. Old Toy, on Campbell Street. I had a date with his daughter. When I got there the place was dark. I opened

it, found his body, upstairs, on a bed."

I gave him the address.

"Okay. You stay put. I'll be there in ten minutes."

Craven's ten minutes were eight. He arrived with a full staff —photographers, fingerprint guys, a couple of detectives. The works.

We went up in a body. The room was beginning to fill with the smell of death. I pointed to the corpse, went out into the corridor.

After a moment Craven joined me. He was a youngish thirty-five, a blond with steely grey eyes hidden away between shrewd wrinkles of flesh. Aquiline nose, small pursed mouth. We were the same build, about six-two, both weighing around two hundred. I'd known him five years, ever since Jack Welch and I had opened the agency. We'd met on a couple of cases. We'd always got along.

Leaving his homicidal technicians buzzing around the corpse, with powder flying, bulbs flashing, we went downstairs, helped ourselves to a slug of poor old Toy's whisky. For the first time I thought of Lana Toy. Had the killers taken her away with them?

"Tough about Jack," Craven was saying. "He was a nice guy. How did you first hear of his death?"

I told him about the early morning phone call from William Alleth, President of the Sun Club.

"When was this, the exact time as near as you can remember?"

"'Bout eight-thirty. I went straight out there."

"You see him?"

"Yes. I also questioned Mr. and Mrs. Alleth briefly. That's how I learned about Jack's association with Miss Toy. I knew you were on the way there so I came in to see her."

"You'd never heard Jack mention her?"

"No. And he was pretty open with me about his dames. Maybe he was coy about becoming a nudist. Didn't want to be ribbed about it."

Craven nodded. "Why didn't you question Miss Toy when you saw her this morning?"

"She passed out when I told her Jack was dead. I thought she'd be more informative later, after she had a chance to get over it."

"Okay. Now tell me what happened tonight, from the time you got here till you called me."

When I'd finished Whitney Craven looked thoughtful. "In your opinion, what's the connection between Jack's murder and Mr. Toy's?" he said.

I shrugged. "Your guess is as good as mine. I'm reserving decision until I can talk to Lana Toy."

"Yeh, I guess you're right. Incidentally, was Jack working on a case?"

"He was doing a job for Enrico Brazzi."

"Okay. Leave Jack's business

to us now. I'll keep you briefed."

I left and went home to bed. My hangover had taken over again, and I knew that only sleep would knock it now.

It was seven a.m. when I came to the next morning. I went down into the foyer for the papers, took them and the coffee pot back to bed. The papers carried both murders on the front page, the nudist atmosphere crowding out the Toy killing for news value.

The newspaper stories didn't connect the two murders.

I finished my coffee, had a shower, dressed. It was eight-fifty. I went into town with the rest of the scurrying eager beavers of nine-to-five existence.

The office door was still locked. Poor Joan. She was taking it hard. I groped for my key, shoved open the door. I pushed it wide, stared at chaos. I looked upon rifled drawers, overturned filing cabinets. The safe door hung limply open, the wall above it was black with powder burns.

No doubt about it, Jack Welch had turned up something hot!

I hauled out the list of addresses I'd made from Jack's notes, the names and addresses of the town's underworld haunts. I decided to start with the nearest, a crummy place named the *Pink Angel.* It boasted a small, exclusive membership—a membership of professional gamblers and con men. Small-timers playing at big time, and ladies of very easy virtue.

It was open, I knew, from noon every day till three or four in the morning. During those sixteen hours you could amble in at any time and partake of a game of very chancey chance. It was run by Benny Rossi.

Benny was dark, slim and tall; handsome, in a menacing sort of way. I said, "Hullo, Benny. How're things?"

"Okay. Long time no see, Art." Then, as an afterthought, "Say, I was real sorry to hear about Jack."

"Thanks. It was tough."

Rossi started mixing drinks. I sat on a bar stool, facing him. Casually, I hoped, I mentioned the Brazzi brothers. He ducked it, went back to small talk. I went back to the Brazzi brothers, more subtly this time.

"You working for the Brazzi brothers?" Benny asked.

Maybe I was subtle, but Benny Rossi was smart

"Not exactly. Why?"

"You're talking about 'em quite a lot."

I changed the subject, said, "Did Jack pay you a visit recently?"

"Haven't seen Jack for months."

I sipped my drink in silence. Beside the name, *Pink Angel,* Jack had penciled a check. That meant he'd paid it a visit. Benny said he hadn't. I finished my drink and left. There was a worried look hanging on Rossi's

handsome face when I thanked him for the drink.

I checked Jack's list again, drew a question mark of my own beside Benny Rossi's name. Below it on the list was the *Black Magic Club*. I knew it opened for business at eight p.m. I drew a line beneath it. Out of the list there were about six that were open in the afternoon. I went to the nearest from the *Pink Angel*, a joint run by Mike Roders. There was no check next to it.

## IV

I drew a blank there. Nobody knew me. Nobody had ever heard of, or seen Jack Welch. It checked, they weren't lying. Next down on the list of calls was Danny Messina who ran a very superior joint to Mike's.

I had an optimistic hunch about this one. Don't ask me why. Maybe I was getting tired of slumming, and this place was no slum. I didn't know Danny Messina. So I had to put on a front. These class joints were as hard to crash as a Masonic lodge is to an O'Rourke from Cork.

I leaned on the buzzer. There was an ornamental knocker that receded into the door, became a minute peephole. An unfriendly eye gave me a toes-to-head once-over.

"Danny here?" I asked.

"Who wants to know?" The voice behind the eye was soft, effeminate.

"The name is Lancing," I said deliberately.

The peephole resumed its duty as a knocker. I was left looking at the closed door. Jack had been to this one. Beside it on his list had been the comment: *Doris. Hat girl?* The knocker became a peephole again, framed a different eye, emitted a different voice. This one spoke a precise, clipped English.

"I'm Danny. What do you want?"

I played a hunch. "I'm Jack Welch's partner. He was here a few days ago. Came to see you about Nick Brazzi."

"You a cop?" the voice said after a pause.

"Private investigator. Welch was my partner. He was killed yesterday. You saw the story in the papers."

He let me in. The foyer was a mirrored modernism. One wall was a cloakroom. Behind its counter was a rhapsody of blonde beauty, nakedly dressed in a skin-tight black creation with a neckline that plunged beyond infinity. I smiled at her.

"You must be Doris?"

"You must have been briefed," Danny said. "That is Doris. Follow me."

The girl didn't say a word. She didn't even seem to have heard what I'd said. I grinned at her again, followed Danny.

Danny led me through a door marked *Manager*, down a hall, off

the foyer. A sumptuous office, furnished with blonde wood furniture. He closed the door, motioned to a foam-rubber-cushioned chair.

Danny wasn't a boy to mince words. "You found Brazzi yet?" he clipped.

"Nope. That's why I'm here. I'm looking for Brazzi—or his body."

"Don't let's get morbid. Why pick my place to look?"

"When did you last see Brazzi?"

"Week ago. At his joint. We're cousins. Now and again one of us gets social, pays a visit."

"That's real nice," I remarked.

He grinned, showing expensive bridgework. "Nick threw a party for Doris, for her birthday. I got plastered. Enrico—you know Enrico?"

I nodded.

"Enrico drove me home. That was November seventeenth, a week ago."

"Doris was Nick's girl?"

"Doris has a lotta guys on her string. Plays the field. Nick goes for blondes. He threw the party to get in good with Doris."

He grinned, man-to-man. I showed him my bridgework, less expensive than his. "About Nick," I said. "You have any theory about his disappearance?"

He took his time. "Anything that happened to Nick wouldn't surprise me. He's not what you'd call a likable character. He had lots of enemies. Maybe someone finally did something about it."

"Can you be more specific?" I stalled, mentally tabbing that he had used the past tense: He *had* enemies . . .

"Such as?" he stalled back.

"Such as names of enemies of Nick Brazzi. Maybe an incident that could have inspired someone to remove him permanently."

"I told you, I only see the guy once in a blue moon."

"You tell Jack Welch all this?"

"Sure, but not so direct. He had a lady with him."

"Lady? He's been holding out on me."

He grinned, leered at me. "She was the goods, believe me. Chinese dame. Young and ripe."

"No kidding!" I returned his leer.

So Lana Toy did the gambling dives with Jack. Maybe I'd been too quick about giving her a clean bill of health.

I climbed to my feet, stuck out a hand, thanked him. At the door I turned and said, "Speaking of women, how's about a nice, formal introduction to Doris? I'm a sucker for blondes."

"Why not? Like I say, she plays the field."

We went back to the foyer. Doris came alive after Danny introduced us. She was young but I saw right away that she knew the score, which always makes it easier.

Danny Messina made grinning background while I arranged time

and place with Doris. We settled for the Havana Club for dinner. Nine o'clock. I could pick her up.

Swell. Fine. Things were shaping up. I said goodbye to a smirking Messina.

I looked at my wrist. It was four-thirty. I thought maybe a beer would be inspirational. It was as good an excuse as any to give myself. I went into the bar of the Kefton, opulent with pile carpets, monkey-suited flunkies, found a soft, sensible easy chair facing the door. I sipped my beer and watched the passing parade.

My idle thoughts terminated in a gasping swallow. I grabbed up a discarded newspaper from a nearby seat, played hide-and-seek behind it like a movie detective. Walking into the lounge, blondly superb on the arm of her husband, was Mrs. Alleth of the Sun Club.

They took a table at the other end of the lounge, near the windows. I watched them, sipping beer with one hand, holding the protective paper with the other.

They were talking fast, urgently. William Alleth stopped talking abruptly, nudged his wife. I saw his lips form the words: *Here he comes.*

I turned my head doorwards. Twisting between tables, looking handsome in a blue-draped jacket with no lapels, was Benny Rossi, proprietor deluxe of the *Pink Angel.*

I ducked lower behind my paper, shifted my gaze back to Alleth. I relied on lip reading because they were too far away for me to hear what was said.

Alleth was talking and his lips said: *I tell you he must know! Because you found nothing in his office is no indication!*

They were obviously speaking of my office and Jack's notes. Rossi took over the conversation. I couldn't see his lips so I missed there. Then the blonde had her say.

*No, I don't agree!* her lips said. *Why make more trouble? I don't think he's that bright. You handled Welch your way, and I think you made a mistake. I say skip it.*

So Rossi had put those slugs through the back of Jack's head! Fine. I knew the score now.

Rossi was talking. His ideas did not please the Alleths. They were scowling at their gin. Alleth's lips snapped: *Damn it, no!*

He grabbed his wife by the arm suddenly and they slid out from behind the table, stood up. They were both mad as hell as they strode out.

I dropped the newspaper, moved across to join Benny. As I slipped into the seat opposite, he looked at me dirty, like when you hate a guy's guts, which he probably did.

"You again!" he snarled. "You're getting to be a nuisance!"

"You're coming for a walk, Benny. With me."

"Who says so?"

I showed him the outline of the Luger through my jacket. His eyes narrowed into slits of brown savagery. His lips compressed with anger.

"Don't try it, Benny. I'd just love to squeeze a couple of slugs into you. I owe you that for Jack."

His eyes opened wide. "Jack! Wadda you talkin' about?"

"Later, Benny. Let's go outside."

## V

We moved through the lounge, Benny leading, and out onto the busy street. I moved across to the taxi rank, keeping Rossi in front of me. I gave the hackie my address, watched a sullen Benny from my corner of the rear seat.

We walked up the stairs in silence, still in follow-the-leader style. I motioned Benny into the living-room, took the Luger from my pocket and laid it on the glass-topped table. He didn't look so confident now. I said, keeping my voice even, toneless:

"You're a brave boy, Benny. You did a good job on Jack—three slugs in the back of his head while the guy was lying down. Sneaked up on him. You don't run any risk that way, do you, Benny?"

He swallowed, looked scared. The yellow in him brought the hate and rage twisting around inside of me. Then it moved up, sitting tight in my chest, throat.

It came out in a surging torrent of violent action. I moved forward, punching. I shoved a stiff left in the direction of his belly. He spun to the left, avoiding it, and threw a swinging haymaker at me, with his weight behind it. I caught it in my open right hand, went back with it. I didn't let go of the hand. I hung onto it, swung it up behind Rossi's back, forcing his arm up in a Nelson. I felt sudden, vicious pain in my left shin from his back kick, and automatically released his arm.

He twisted, jolted me in the solar with his right. I gasped inadvertently, my head went down. I kept it that way, rushed in, brought it up with a sudden snap. It smashed under his chin. I felt him stagger. I went in with short, stabbing punches. He went down, curling up, holding his belly, moaning through clenched teeth.

When consciousness finally returned, he found himself back in the straight-backed chair. Only this time he was supported by a tightly wound clothesline.

"Benny, you and I are going to have a talk," I said.

He gave me the silent treatment. I gave him a slap across the mouth. I said, "You killed Jack Welch. He was my partner. He was a swell guy. I've taken my feelings out of your hide, but I'm letting the law-and-order boys give you the justice and retribution part. That's because I'm cool and detached. I can keep the old temper screwed down, but if

things annoy me I'm liable to remember Jack lying out there at the Sun Club, naked, with three bullets in his skull. See what I mean, Benny?"

He stayed tight-lipped, but he was scared. I knew he'd crack in a minute.

"What had Jack turned up concerning Nick Brazzi's disappearance? What was it that made his death so necessary?"

A crafty look came into his eyes. He began to talk. "Aw, it was only a bit of gang war. Rivalry between the boys. You know how it is when one guy gets cute and begins to have big ideas. Enrico was okay, but Nick was beginning to get in our hair."

"And that's all it was?"

"Sure, what else? You cops are all alike. You like things complicated. Never happy, even when you've got something solved. Always lookin' for another angle."

"Yeh. Speaking of angles, what were the Alleths so excited about back there at the Kefton? Where do they fit in? They were pretty mad at you for something. Was it because you got too hasty, murdered Jack on their property?"

I'd hit pay dirt there. I could see the flicker in his brown eyes. I pressed it all the way. "You jumped the gun, didn't you. You were not carrying out the original plan."

He shook his head, kept his mouth shut.

"While you're talking, tell me who ransacked my office. And what were they looking for?"

"How do I know?" he snarled.

"Benny, boy, don't stop now. Remember—I hate you!"

"Danny Messina," he muttered.

"You don't say! What was he looking for, Benny?"

"Papers, evidence about Nick he thought Welch may have turned up."

"Did he find them?"

"How in hell would I know? It's your office, don't you know?"

"Yeh, I know, Benny. I know, too, that there's more than a gang killing and the murder of a cop behind this. Why was the Chinaman killed? What did he know?"

He didn't answer. He might have, but the buzz of my doorbell stopped him. It was no time for visitors. I cursed, went to the door.

Danny Messina stood there, flanked by two giants with punchy faces. I didn't invite them in. Self-preservation made two distinct movements. I slammed the door with one hand, shot the bolt with the other. I didn't hang around. I went out through the window, down the fire escape to terra firma, tight, bunched muscles sending my legs stabbing like pistons. I swung into the bar on the corner.

I rang Craven. I was lucky again. Whitney Craven was on duty. I told him in clipped sentences the score. He said he'd be there in ten minutes. Then I

slumped well down in the rear booth and hoped Danny Messina didn't come looking for a certain private eye who asks too many questions.

Craven was on schedule. A large black car pulled into the curb on the dot of ten minutes. I walked out and met them. I looked up at my place when we drew in opposite. The windows were dark.

Craven motioned two cops around the back to the fire-escape. We went up the main stairs, hugging the wall, guns drawn.

I kicked the door open. It slammed against the wall inside. I groped with my left hand for the light switch, flicked it on, Craven and his men on my heels. The place was empty. I had left Benny in the kitchen. I motioned to Craven, walked through to the kitchen. It was as I had left it. Rossi still sat in the chair, but his head was slumped onto his chest now.

I walked over and lifted his head. It was heavy and limp. Protruding from his back, just above the left kidney, was a stiletto handle. There wasn't much blood. What there was had soaked into his blue jacket. This case was getting to have more murders than a "B" picture!

Craven said, "All right, Art, let's go down to headquarters and get your statement."

I gave them all I knew. I told them how Benny Rossi had implied that Nick Brazzi was murdered, how he'd admitted that it was Danny Messina who had worked over my office.

Craven said, "Okay, Art, you've been a big help. Thanks for snooping, and for taking advice about calling on us if the going got tough."

I grinned at him. "I'm no Lone Avenger. I like to be alive. One other thing, Whit—I'm taking Messina's hat-check girl out tonight. I'd hate to call for her and walk in on Messina."

"Don't worry. We'll have picked him up by then. Give me a ring to check on it. You know the number."

Doris lived in Elizabeth Bay in an old house that had been split up into apartments. Doris had an apartment on the ground floor. There was a delicatessen next door. I went in there and called Craven before ringing Doris' bell.

He didn't have any happy tidings to impart. Messina hadn't been picked up. His place was being watched. So was Doris'.

I went next door and buzzed Doris' bell. She was a long time answering. She finally opened up and threw the door wide. The diffused light from the apartment silhouetted her as she stood there, smiling an invitation. I stood there looking foolishly at that luscious bundle and forgot that any character named Messina existed!

"You look impressed, handsome," she drawled.

"That's an understatement.

Looks like I'm early, or are you late?"

"A woman's always late, particularly when the man's calling for her."

"Thanks for the briefing. You alone?"

"Sure, who did you expect? My husband?"

We went to the *Havana*. We had Scotches at the bar, so much Scotch that I began to tell the barman how to make whiz-bangs. We had whiz-bangs. Then we went in for the floor show and Chicken Maryland.

I reluctantly reminded myself that this was a business date. I began to move the conversation around to gambling. I sent feelers. I struck uranium. Doris began to talk, her voice low and sexy.

"You know Art, I'm a funny girl. I work in a gambling joint yet I get a kick out of going to the joints on my own time. I want to be a customer for a change. You know—busman's holiday."

"Shall we go somewhere now and try our luck?"

"I'd love it! Where?" She stood up. I wrapped my fingers around the marble smoothness of her arm.

"I know a joint. Not so elaborate as Danny Messina's, but a good house. Okay?"

"I'll say!" She gave me a dreamy-eyed look and I loved it. A private eye's job could be fun sometimes.

We had just one more drink at the bar for luck. Then we taxied over to Cobelli's. Giorgi Cobelli was short and swarthy. He always reminded me of Al Capone. Doris knew him from Messina's. He gave us a big hello.

"Hi ya, Doris. Glad to see you, Lancing."

He flashed a golden grin. Doris smiled back at him but not such an expensive grin; hers was merely enamel. I grinned too, adding variety—mine was porcelain.

We ambled across to the two business tables. I pushed Doris into a seat vacated by a depressed-looking Greek and slipped her a hundred. I didn't want to play. I was watching for the stir Doris' presence would cause when they all caught on to the fact that Messina's hat-check girl was there, squired by the cop all the rumpus was about.

Smoke was thick around the tables. It gagged at my throat. I moved against the wall, my eyes on Doris and Cobelli. Doris watched the table and Cobelli kept his eyes on Doris. I went to the bar phone booth, rang Craven, told him where I was. He said Messina hadn't been located yet so I was to watch out for myself. I didn't need warning. I was taut with expectancy. Messina would be looking for me, sure as hell. I put down the phone, went back to Doris. She was sitting gleefully behind a stack of currency.

"Look, Art, I'm winning!"

"How much?" Lancing asked.

"About nine-fifty. Here's your hundred."

"Don't I get a commission?"

"Of course! You get half of this."

"Don't press your luck, kid. Better leave it right now."

"All right, if you say so."

An angry-faced Giorgi Cobelli was moving toward me, flanked by two swarthy bouncers. We got as far as the door. One of the strong-arms said:

"Just a minute, Mister Lancing, Mister Cobelli wants to see you."

"Some other time. We're in a hurry."

"It's very important."

He said it cold-eyed. The words came out flat, toneless. Behind him Cobelli stood, surly, angry, still looking like a double for Al Capone. I shrugged my shoulders.

"Come on, Doris. Let's see what he wants."

The swarthy twosome closed in behind us. Cobelli turned and walked toward a door in one corner. We followed with our escorts crowding our heels. Doris was clinging to my arm, her fingers tight and trembling. I thought longingly of whiz-bangs or a straight Scotch.

They ushered us in unceremoniously. Cobelli stood in the middle of the floor, glowering at us. Doris said in a nervous falsetto, "What's the idea, George. Who do you think you're pushing around?"

"You shut up. I wanna speak to him."

He jerked a grimy thumb in my direction. I looked around the small room—flaking paint on the wall, a battered roll-topped desk spotted with cigarette burns, a couple of sagging armchairs, leather-covered. Above a refuse-cluttered fireplace hung a twelve-by-fourteen-inch photograph in a dark oak frame. A young guy, handsome, debonair in an opened-at-the-neck sports shirt. A bandolier was swung across his chest. He was clean shaven, with curling black hair, shaggy over the ears, square-jawed, laughing-eyed. Around twenty-six years old. I knew the face but the name escaped me. Cobelli intruded upon my speculating.

"What you find out from Benny Rossi, Lancing?"

"I know he killed Jack Welch. That's all I wanted to know. It was tough enough beating that out of him. What are you getting all worked up about? He murdered my partner. He got what was coming to him, only not by me."

"Who killed him?"

"You know as well as I do."

He stared at me for a while in silence. I began to feel icy fingers again along my spine. Something was cooking, something big! I wondered how far these boys would go to get their information.

Cobelli wasn't long in showing me. He motioned to the other two guys, gargled something Italian.

They grabbed me, frog-walked me over to one of the leather armchairs. Cobelli kept talking to them in quick, staccato Italian. One guy gave me a couple of slaps across the face. I remembered Benny, bloody and drooping.

Cobelli said, "Okay, Mister Lancing, you be a good fella, tell us about all you found out from Benny Rossi."

You give a character a working over. Okay. It boomerangs right back at you. It's fate, or maybe I was getting lousy luck. I didn't know what Cobelli wanted to know but he was worried about something. I absorbed a couple more slaps, this time with a closed hand.

It went on like that for a while. Then I began to try and satisfy Cobelli's curiosity from the void of my ignorance. I was taking quite a beating so I talked, talked a flow of baloney, angle talk, probing for the subject that had him so worried. He wouldn't give, didn't drop a clue.

Release finally came from an unexpected quarter. I'd just collected a couple more slaps when the door banged open and a nervous Italian with a twitching face burst into the room, babbling in his mother tongue.

Cobelli and his thugs looked scared. They looked at Doris, at me, babbled some more Italian, left the room on the run.

Doris began to untie me with shaking hands. She dabbed at my bloody face with her handkerchief. She was really concerned. I guess I must have looked a mess. My left cheek felt swollen, my lips were puffing up and both ears blazed from the cuffs they'd collected.

I was on my feet again by the time Craven arrived, surrounded by his junior officers. I managed a swollen grin. "Whit, I'll take you on as my partner after this, regardless."

"You look like you need one. What happened to the face?"

"Give you three guesses, all of them nasty."

He grinned, then he saw the photograph above the fireplace of the handsome young swashbuckler. He stopped grinning, jerked his head towards it. His men nodded wisely. I was about to ask him who the guy in the picture was when he said, "Know where Cobelli went, Art?"

"No. He left after some of his Italian-speaking boys came in." Someone tipped him about six minutes before you arrived. You found Messina yet?"

"No, but it won't be long."

"Er, Whit, who's the guy in the picture? I can't place him, but the face looks familiar."

"That's Salvatore Guiliano. Ring a bell?"

Salvatore Guiliano . . . Salvatore Guiliano. Of course! The Sicilian Robin Hood. Robbing the landowners, giving to the

peasants. The Italian police had shot him sometime last year.

"Yeh, now it rings a bell. Sicilian Robin Hood. Check."

"You've got it. Now I've given you a slant. You still on the Nick Brazzi case?"

"Yeh, Enrico will want to know who actually killed his brother. I don't know that yet."

"Okay. It all fits in. That's what Cobelli was trying to bang out of you."

He turned to Doris. "You'll be all right now?"

Doris nodded, tried to smile, but her bottom lip was trembling too much.

I said, "I'll take her home. Whit—one more question. Any news of Lana Toy?"

"Nope. She's just disappeared . . . You know, Art, this is a screwy case."

"Now you're stating facts."

I took Doris home. She cried all the way. She was scared as hell and as mixed up. Poor kid didn't know what it was all about. We got to Elizabeth Bay. I paid off the cabby and followed her to the door.

"Come in a minute, Art. I'm scared. I could have said I'd fix your face as an excuse, but I'm really scared, Art."

"Sure, Doris. I'll mix up a couple of my specials. They'll make you sleep like a babe."

I went to work with the Scotch, Vermouth, Grenadine and other ingredients. It made the daddy of all whiz-bangs. I waited for Doris to return from the bedroom. I waited until I began to imagine Messina abducting Doris from her own bedroom while a beat-up private eye mixed whiz-bangs in the living room. I gave her a call.

"Come in, Art. Bring the drinks."

I shouldered open the bedroom door, a glass in each hand. Doris was in a wisp of black nothingness, combing her hair in front of a be-mirrored dressing table. She patted the satin-covered bench. She was smiling and she didn't look scared now . . .

## VI

I left Doris as dawn tinted the harbor grey-green, with early-morning mist hanging low over the water. I was glad to get home. I set the alarm clock for ten and tumbled between crisp linen.

I awoke to the noonday strokes of the nearby church clock, lay for that extra five minutes. Then I remembered I was a hard-working character with a case unsolved.

Salvatore Guiliano . . . Sicily . . . Mysterious Italians worried about how much a private eye had dug up. So what? Where was the punchline to make logic from that haphazard bunch of angles? Then it hit me like cold water on a winter morning. The Mafia!

I was dumb! It was obvious. It had glared at me all along the

line, every joint where I'd investigated Italians. Enrico and Nick Brazzi. Benny Rossi. Giorgio Cobelli. Danny Messina . . . Craven was wise. He knew there was more than just a couple of murders back of all the rumpus.

I dressed in nothing flat, grabbed a cruising cab and went to Little Italy.

I knew a few characters who lived there. Cosmos Thermoplae, a Greek boy I'd met in the Navy. Tony Brunelleshi, Italian-American who drove a hired car . . .

I decided on Marie Lanvin, a raven-haired beauty I knew from wild parties during the war. She opened the door herself. She hadn't changed much, except she was maybe a little more solid around the hips.

"Hullo, Marie. Remember me?"

"Well, what d'you know! Art Lancing, the personality boy, turned super-sleuth."

"You know my present honorable profession, then?"

"You've had some good write-ups. All over the front page. Come in and tell me all about everything and why you came calling on Marie Lanvin."

From the outside, the Lanvin residence was just another of those crummy, congested, cold-water walk-ups. But inside, Marie's was definitely not of that category. Imagination coupled with no shortage of money had transformed it into a little show place. Draperies and cunningly placed mirrors gave illusion of length and spread. The living-room was a dream of luxury in leopard-skin-covered furniture. She went to a bar-cabinet.

"What'll you have, Art?"

"You have Scotch?"

"Certainly, house of plenty."

We sipped Scotch and looked at each other carefully, searching for the more obvious marks of time.

"Art, you've been fighting. Your face is swollen."

"Not fighting, kid. I was a punching bag for a couple of guys seeking information."

I played the nonchalant hero with the ice water nerves. She looked at me and said, "Tell me, Art, why did you *really* come to see me?"

One name from Jack's list had been worrying me. A hastily scribbled name with a question mark beside it. I asked, "Marie, have you ever heard of Henry Phillips?"

She took her time. "Yes. Yes, Art, somewhere. But I can't remember where."

"Try hard, Marie. It's important."

"I'm sorry. What is he? I mean, what does he do? Give me a clue."

I gave her the story, from Nick Brazzi and Jack's murders through Lana Toy and her dead father, to Rossi's murder in my apart-

ment. She listened, wide-eyed, to the recital of mayhem.

"It sounds big, Art. What do you want from me?"

"Do you know any of these names?" I read from Jack's list.

"I know one only—Beppo Giotto."

"You know his address?"

"Nineteen Chalmer Street."

"Thanks, Marie. Every little bit helps." I said goodbye a few minutes later and left.

Nineteen Chalmer was exactly like every other house in the block. There was a church opposite. I moved into the concealing shadow of its portals, kept a sharp eye on the house. I smoked and stewed, wondering if I was wasting time. Wondering how the Mafia fitted into the picture.

Suddenly my break came. Danny Messina opened the door of No. 19, came out onto the porch. He was in shirt sleeves, tie pulled down, top button of his shirt opened. He rolled a cigarette, stood smoking lazily.

He finished his cigarette, flicked the butt into the gutter, took one reluctant look at a buxom blonde walking past the house, went back inside.

I gave him a minute, went to the corner, rang Craven. He was out. I gave them the address, made a big impression when I told them that this was where they'd find Danny Messina. I went back to the church and propped against the friendly pillar. Only it wasn't friendly any more. It had grown a gun. A hostile gun, shoved hard up into my kidneys. It had a voice now, too, a smooth voice that enunciated each word, was a little effeminate. The voice from the peephole back in Messina's place.

"Walk across the street and into the house, Lancing."

I obeyed implicitly. The door swung open to my touch. Inside, lined up like relatives at a wedding, were Messina and three of his boys. Facing across from me, sunk in the depths of a battered chair, sensually appealing in a high-collared, slit-to-thigh Chinese costume was a very frightened Lana Toy. She looked rumpled. She wore no make-up, shadows were black beneath her slanting eyes, her hands expanded and contracted nervously. I smiled down at her.

"Take it easy, kid. It's nearly over," I said.

She managed a half smile.

Messina came across to me, stood close in, snorted, "Shut up."

I shut up. I had nothing more to say. Messina started shouting excitedly in Italian. One of the gorilla's grabbed my Luger, then my arm, hustled me through the back of the house, out into a small paved yard. Another thug followed with Lana Toy.

The separating fences were knocked down between three of the houses. The last house was a corner. I was pushed into the

back door of the corner building, on through the house. It seemed deserted. I worried about the cops and how to attract them because they'd go to Number 19 . . .

We came to a small room in the front of the house, with a door that opened straight onto the street. I thought vaguely of breaking for it here, twisting out of the guy's grip, taking a chance of making it out through the door before they started throwing lead. I didn't have to take the risk.

Craven and four of his boys were in possession of the room, menacingly competent behind their heavy service revolvers.

Messina screamed something filthy at Craven, shoved Lana Toy and me into the room. I fell forward twisting, his jacket lapel in my hand, pulling him down with me.

Thunder filled the room as Craven's guns brought down two of Messina's boys. The third, the guy with the nancey voice, ducked for the street with two cops on his heels.

Craven kicked Messina to his feet. I got noble over Lana Toy, assisted her to a chair, went in search of hard liquor. The moans of the two characters who'd collected the lead mingled with Lana Toy's quiet sobbing.

I came back with two bottles of sweet vermouth and my pockets full of glasses. I filled five of them, handed one to Lana Toy, one each to the casualties, divided the last two between Craven and myself.

The two cops returned, disgusted by failure, panting from running and fence jumping.

"He got away," one of them said apologetically.

Craven scowled. "Okay," he said. "Can't be helped. Go get an ambulance and a couple of boys as escort to the hospital."

One of the twosome walked over and opened the street door. His six feet of heavy brawn must have made an unmissable target. The bullet that hit him went accurately into his heart. He collapsed concertina fashion, a silent fold from the knees.

I looked out through the window carefully, in respect for the accuracy of the unknown sniper. The street was deserted. "What goes, Whit?" I asked.

He shrugged. "The little guy obviously went for reinforcements." He nodded toward Messina. "It is also obvious that this guy is a pretty important man in the organization. How about that, Messina? What's the idea of the ambush? You guys must be crazy, attempting to ambush police officers in broad daylight. What's it about?"

"Make your own guesses, copper."

Craven ignored the remark. "If they are trying to rescue you, Messina, it's wasted effort, believe me. I'm going to put a slug into you unless you call 'em off."

Messina the tough guy. Messina with the cool contempt for cops. He just looked at us, a surly grin twisting his lips. Craven was getting hot under the collar. I could see it in his set lips, the facial muscles twitching them down at the corners. I could see it in the tightened grip on his heavy revolver.

"Take it easy, Whit."

"Conceited, ambitious dogs! Trying to take over with their Black Hand."

"Easy, now. Why don't you lock him in a closet, get him out of sight if he annoys you so much."

"That's an idea. See if you can find a hole for this rat, Art. Something dark and unpleasant."

## VII

I went looking for a closet. There was a door under the stairs, a man-sized padlock securing it. I wondered if it led to a wine cellar. Chalmer Street is a tough place. You'd need to lock your liquor up tight to keep it. I found a tire lever in a box of tools under the kitchen sink, went back to the padlock. It didn't give, but the hasp splinted out of the woodwork.

It wasn't a wine cellar. It looked more like the hold of a battleship. There must have been a hundred rifles and the same number of revolvers, all makes, all ages. The payoff was a long wooden box stashed away at the rear of a cupboard that had *gelatin* stenciled on it in black, and beneath, in glaring boxcar red, the words: *Danger-Explosive*.

I went back to Craven and his boys, to a silent Lana Toy, to an equally silent Messina and his two shot-up gorillas. I motioned Craven to follow me.

"It isn't Messina they're worried about," I said. "It's this stuff . . ."

He whistled through closed teeth when he saw it. "Wow!" he said. "An armory! They've got more guns here than we've got down at headquarters."

We went back to the little front room. One of the cops had his arm around Lana Toy's shoulder and she was sobbing into his big, manly chest. I felt cheated . . . cops!

Craven said, "There's a regular armory here. This house must be their cache. It's what these characters are fighting about. They can't let us leave here alive because we've seen it. Once they're rid of us they'll move in, distribute the artillery, hide it somewhere else. They'll sacrifice a couple of their guys to take the rap for our killings, but the gang will still have the armory."

My own conclusion went right down the line with his. I said, "Why not let me try to get out the back way while you give them a big play in the front?"

"Try and open the back door and if you don't get a bullet

through your head you can have my badge."

I took him up on it, went back to the kitchen, grabbed a broom, turned the door knob, pulled open the door and stuck the broom out a bit, keeping myself well back against the wall.

Craven was one-hundred percent right. The volley of concentrated fire I drew would have cut down a Sherman tank. The door was splintered from a couple of dozen bullets. The place must be crawling with Mafia members!

I went back to a grinning Craven.

There was a brief impasse Both sides stayed put, keeping concealed behind protecting brickwork.

"It's just a matter of time," Craven said, "before we get reenforcements. Some honest citizen will have called the cops by now, after all that gun fire."

"Yeh. But will they get here in time to save our skins?" I said. I knew Craven knew it too, but he didn't want to alarm the girl. Neither did I so I spoke out of the corner of my mouth, keeping it low.

Lana Toy was withdrawn into her Oriental shell, sitting across the room. Messina looked surly from a bucket seat in the corner. I had planned to talk to the girl, decided this was as good a time as any, perhaps even the last chance I'd have. I went over, regardless of the hostile eyes of the police boys.

"You've had a tough time, kid," I said gently. "Maybe if you told me everything it would help."

Black eyes, tear-reddened, probed into mine. The full red lips trembled as she said, "You probably think I was the cause of Jack's death, but I wasn't—I wasn't!"

I gave her a handkerchief and a little more from the Vermouth bottle. She calmed down and I tried again.

"Tell me about Jack, Lana. How you met him. How you initiated him into that nudism club."

She finished the Vermouth, began to relate in soft monotone the early stages of her romance with Jack Welch.

The cult of nudism had always appealed to her. Even as a child she shed her clothes at every opportunity, loving the sun on her body. Her brother saw nudism through the artist's eyes of a professional photographer. Neither of them saw anything vulgar in it. So she posed for those nude photographs that her brother sold to the nudist magazines.

Then one day a man purporting to represent a magazine called *The Nudist* approached her, gave her a sales talk about the cult of nudism and invited her to join the Sun Nudist Club.

Okay. Fine. She took the plunge, became an ardent mem-

ber. Then they asked her to lure into the club a man who, if he could be persuaded to embrace nudism, would be a priceless asset to the cult.

It was a corny line, but she was an ardent, trusting sun worshipper by then and she agreed. The man they wanted was Jack Welch. She didn't know why.

Lana Toy made Jack's acquaintance and succeeded in bringing him to the club. I could guess why he'd gone. It's not every day a damsel like Lana suggests a twin strip. Jack would have done it for a gag and out of curiosity if for no other reason.

His murder had taken place on a day when he'd arranged to meet her at the club. One point indicated a premeditated set-up. Their date had been for two p.m. Jack was killed early that morning. In all probability he had been decoyed by a phony call changing the time of their date, so Lana wasn't there.

Immediately following my visit to the Toys', Messina had arrived. Lana didn't know Messina from the man in the Kremlin, and told him to get out of her father's shop. He side-swiped her, and when the old man rushed in to protect his daughter Messina killed him. After carrying the old guy upstairs to his bed, Messina brought Lana straight to Chalmer Street.

She stopped her recital, began to sob again. I looked across at Craven, who had been listening. He opened his mouth to speak, then stopped as one of his boys said: "Hey, chief, take a look." Me motioned toward the window where he stood.

"That car's got a funny look about it," the cop said. "It's coming slow, with no lights." He moved over and we got a chance at the slit below the window shade. Even as we looked the car slowed almost to a halt in front of the house.

Craven dived for the floor, pulling me with him, yelling: "On the floor—all of you!"

## VIII

We were in a small room off to the right of the big front room, which is why we're alive to tell the tale. We heard two thuds in the big room as we hit the floor. Then a blast of sound, and the dividing wall began to crumble into a heap of twitching rubble.

As the ceiling in our cubbyhole began to rain plaster I groped for Lana Toy, and we stumbled dazedly back to the rear of the room, through a door into the hallway leading to the kitchen. I thought: This is like 'All Quiet On The Western Front'; we've even got a sergeant!

Craven was barking orders above the din. I pushed the girl down beside the refrigerator, told her to stay there, and ran back to Craven's side.

I was in time to see Messina hurdling the bricks and plaster

of the outside wall of the big room, heading for the street. Craven and I fired simultaneously. When we looked up above our pile of bricks Messina was a slumped, groveling heap.

Craven looked pleased with himself, said, "I wonder if that guy was a biggie in their setup. He was nasty enough."

I said, "Could be. He's Brazzi's cousin. He may have known a lot more about Nick's murder than he spilt to me. It was he who intimated to me that Nick Brazzi was dead and had not simply disappeared."

The whine of patrol cars blasted the night then—it sounded like a dozen of them—and Craven began to grin. I found myself relaxing, too, and realized for the first time how tense I'd been. I began to think about Scotch and whiz-bangs.

Well, P.D. cars filled the block and seconds later blue-uniformed cops boiled out of them and began to fill the house and the street, moving around like orderly marionettes.

As I headed for the street, Craven called, "Where you off to?"

"It's all over here, Whit, and I want to finish up Jack's job for Enrico Brazzi."

He nodded, said, "Call me later."

As I hit the street I grinned at the sight of the blue-clad boys jostling cursing gangsters into police patrol cars. As I walked along I looked at their faces, and suddenly I saw one that stopped me.

A rotund, short figure, the white hair bristling in a crew cut, finely sculptured, tanned, sensual face. William Alleth, president of the Sun Nudist Club!

I managed to grab him before he was bundled into a P.D. car. The cop turned him over to me when I flashed the piece of pasteboard that declared my means of livelihood, said, "Craven will okay it. He's there in the house. I was with him."

The cop nodded, said, "Don't lose this guy."

"He's as good as booked," I told him, grinning. "He's one guy I can't afford to lose."

Alleth looked ten years older than he had that morning. His face drooped, likewise his lumpy shoulders. I hustled him into the doorway of a small grocery store, shoved him flat against the door, kept him that way with a hand on each lapel of his jacket.

"Let's have it, Alleth. Talk."

He grumbled into his collar, twisted in an effort to dodge under my arm. I gave him a slap across his mouth and he went quiet. "What are you doing acting as gunman for the Mafia? What's the pay-off?"

He shook his head vehemently. "No! I've nothing to do with the Mafia! But why should I tell you?

I'll make my statement to the police!"

"You'll tell *me,* Alleth. It was my partner who was killed in your phony nudist club. I saw you meet Rossi in the lounge of the Kefton. You were being paid by Rossi to keep quiet about his being a gangster, to keep that news from Lana Toy because Rossi, after meeting her in your club, fell crazy in love with her. He knew she'd have nothing to do with him if she knew the truth about him."

He nodded, his heavy face drooping flabbily.

"Now, tell me what I *don't* know, or so help me I'll give you the daddy of all workings over," I said. "You got Lana to lure Jack into the club to lend it more respectability. Rossi killed Jack when he saw that Lana Toy had fallen for him. Now, you take it from there."

"All right, all right." He talked eagerly now. "It's the Mafia. They concentrate on the Italian community, the wealthy members, of course. They were bleeding Nick Brazzi, a tough boy in his own right. He stopped paying the protection money, was liquidated.

"Nick hadn't told any of this to his brother Enrico. When Nick disappeared, Enrico hired your agency to look for him. Enrico is a gambler, big-time but not legitimate. He couldn't yell cop. Mafias began to sweat when your partner, Jack Welch, got a clue to the connection between their organization and Nick's disappearance. They planned to get rid of Welch and Rossi was glad to do the job because of Lana Toy. It fitted beautifully. By killing him in my nudist club nobody would ever suspect the Black Hand gang."

I nodded. It was a lovely set-up.

"They came up with the bright idea of linking Jack Welch with the Chinese girl. Nobody ever connects Chinese with Italians—they just never mix; they're poles apart mentally, emotionally. Rossi had seen Lana's nude photograph in the nudist magazine. He fell for her and joined our club to meet her."

"Paid you plenty for his membership, I'll bet," I growled.

He shrugged. "It's a business, Mr. Lancing."

"All right. You made your point. Go on."

"Okay. Through Lana, Mr. Welch got a line on the Mafia and Rossi's connection. She revealed it innocently for she did not know the truth about Rossi. All right. That answer your question? Will you let me go now, Mr. Lancing? Please, my wife—"

"How did you get mixed up in this gun battle?"

"I—I came to pick up some money from Messina."

"From Messina?" That didn't jibe, but I let it go. Craven could follow up on the Messina angle. Alleth was probably black-

mailing more than one sucker. I shoved him into the last of the P.D. cars.

I went looking for Craven; found him in the middle of a group of blue-clad public servants.

He turned, saw me, said, "Art, I'll want you later down at Headquarters. All right?"

"I'll be there. Where's Lana Toy? I'm taking her home."

He grinned. "Over there in the car. I had the same idea. But you go ahead."

She sat there like a Tibetan priest in a trance. She turned those glittering black orbs on me when I spoke her name.

"Come on, Lana. I'll take you home."

I guided her out of the car, took her arm, tucked it beneath mine and hailed a cab. As we rode to Campbell Street, I questioned her gently. "You be all right here alone? Haven't you any other family?"

She shook her head.

"How about neighbors?"

No reaction at all this time.

"Would you like me to stay downstairs tonight and keep an eye on things?"

She nodded, looked relieved.

I spent a lousy night. I woke at five in the morning, worked hard for an hour looking for Pappa Toy's whisky. Then I went into the kitchen and made a pot of tea, some toast, boiled four eggs. I went up to Lana Toy's room, balancing the tray precariously.

I opened two doors before I found her bedroom. She slept curled up like a child, the clothes bunched around her hips. I coughed politely from the doorway. She still slept. I coughed again, louder.

She awoke like a young virgin, eyes popping open, mouth distended in a cute "Oh!" of surprise, hands fluttering, plucking for the sheets.

"I brought you some breakfast."

She nodded mutely. I guess so obvious a statement didn't rate an answer.

"I'll have mine downstairs. You get dressed, huh? Then I want to ask you some more questions."

"Yes, yes! And thank you so much for staying the night. It was very kind."

I lied like a gentleman. "A pleasure, believe me. A pleasure."

She came down in a little while. She wore a black silk dressing gown that clung to her rounded little body like an extra skin. I tried not to look too hard. I wondered what she knew about Alleth.

"Listen, kid. Don't think I'm a cop twenty-four hours out of twenty-four. But there's a couple of points worrying me. Maybe you can straighten me out."

She nodded, smiling.

"Could you describe the official from the Sun Club who visited you, asked you to join?"

Anger clouded her face. She spoke quickly. "Mr. Alleth is also a member of the Black Hand."

"How do you know he's a Mafia member?"

"I—I overheard him talking to Benny Rossi. When I told Jack what they had said—it didn't make sense to me—Jack said it meant they were members of the Mafia."

I nodded. It cleaned that point. Everybody is mercenary. Society makes you that way, it's the basis of our education. To make a lot of money, to be a success. A character like Alleth doesn't go gun toting unless there's money in it, big money. The Mafia means big dough. I still didn't know who had actually killed Nick.

"Lana, one thing more. Did you ever hear the name, Nick Brazzi, mentioned?"

"Yes, I did. He was murdered, wasn't he? I heard someone boasting about killing him. I was in the next room. I didn't see who it was. Someone they called Henry."

"Henry! Henry Phillips?"

"I only heard him referred to as Henry."

"Did he sound like an Italian. I mean did he have an accent?"

"No, he sounded rather English."

"Thanks, Lana, thanks. You gave me what I needed. Look, I've got to go down to Headquarters to see Detective Craven. I'll phone my secretary to come up and stay with you. Okay?"

She nodded. I gave her a kiss, left her looking wistful.

I found a haggard Whit Craven interviewing a grubby gangster. It was practically a monologue, with Craven in the star role.

"Hi, Art!"

"Lo, Whit. Looks like you're having trouble. You guys should agitate for a permanent interpreter around here."

"We had one, a regular United Nations. He left, went into business as a lawyer representing immigrants. The mercenary bum."

"Have you interviewed William Alleth yet?"

"Yeh, why?"

"That's where you got it."

"Got what?"

"That word, mercenary."

"So?"

"So Lana Toy says Alleth did not go toting a gun only because he was mercenary. He was also a member of the Black Hand."

Craven did not look impressed. I said: "Er, Whit. I'm sorry to interrupt, but I'm not interested in William Alleth. I'm looking for a Henry Phillips. You interview him yet?"

He went back to his card shuffling. "Nope. No Phillips."

"Well, maybe he used some other name. You have a smoothie in here who speaks English like an Englishman?"

"You kiddin'? Only four out of

the twenty-six spoke any sort of English."

"Who are the four. What's their names?"

He resumed his shuffling, came up with four cards in his right hand, read from them in his office voice. Flat and toneless, like an all-night disc jockey's.

"Buonavis, Angelo. Orsini, Gianpaolo. Alleth, William. Brazzi, Enrico."

"What! What was that last name?"

He repeated it in the same detached voice.

"Is Enrico Brazzi a member of the Mafia?"

"Sure, he's one of the chief organizers."

"Then he's Henry Phillips! He killed Nick Brazzi, his own brother!"

"You're crazy!"

"Maybe. But he's the one who hired us. He's the character that hated Mafia and all it stood for, so he said. Get him in here."

Craven leaned over the small box on his desk, clicked down a switch. A voice said, "Yes, sir?"

"Bring in Enrico Brazzi."

Enrico came in flanked by two beefy cops. I came to the point. "Brazzi, why did you kill your brother?"

He blinked quickly, shook his head like a fighter receiving a punch that really hurt.

"Why did you kill him, Brazzi?" I repeated.

"Why not? You guys would find it out anyway." He paused, as if choosing his words. "You know Doris?"

"You mean Doris who was Messina's hat-check girl?"

He nodded, said, "That was the reason."

Craven looked sore. "Why the hell didn't I think of that?" he muttered.

Enrico looked suddenly old. He slumped forward, elbows on his knees, head between his hands. "All right. I'll talk. Nick was young, flashy, a man about town. I was crowding fifty, with a beat-up, fat body. Nick was always flaunting his women in front of me. One day it was Doris he flaunted. I went crazy. I knew Doris—well. I was mad about her. She went for me in a way . . ."

He enjoyed speaking of Doris. His eyes were aglow.

"Soon," he continued, "she began seeing me instead of Nick once she knew who had the big dough. Nick's pride was hurt. His vanity didn't take to guys, especially old guys, stealing his women. We quarreled. I killed him."

Craven said, "Where's the body?" Real cop-like.

Enrico looked up. His eyes were dead. "In the bay."

Craven said, "Okay. Go on, Brazzi."

"That's all. I killed him because of Doris."

*Please turn to page* 160

# a clean-up in stratford

*by . . .*
*Henry Morton Robinson*

**What is love without blackmail? P. Thurslby Ginch tried it, with results that surprised even him.**

P. THURLSBY GINCH was running a fever. Not a contagious, clinical fever, but a prickly, collar-wilting fever of purple jealousy and cross-eyed rage.

The fever rose nineteen to twenty-four degrees every time he passed Hurlburt Holt's dressing room and observed the bright gold star on Holt's door. The star signified, among other things, that Hurlburt Holt was leading man of the Stanhope Repertory Players, and that his pay envelope was twice as fat as Mr. Ginch's.

It also reminded Mr. Ginch that Hurlburt Holt had very recently joggled him out of the affections of Grelda Bourne.

Did these reflections fall like gentle rain upon P. Thurlsby Ginch's fevered vanity? Alas, no. In fact, they made him quite, quite certain that he wanted to bounce a dainty Stillson-wrench right off the tip of Mr. Holt's much too Roman nose.

Until the sleek and sophisticated Holt joined the Stanhope Players, Grelda Bourne had been the sugar and spice of P. Thurlsby's existence.

Dimpled and blond, Grelda was the perfect ingenue type, and a

*Henry Morton Robinson's humor is of the school that brings an inward chuckle from his reader, then gives him a twist of irony at the end. A rare type of humor, strictly for adults . . . A rescued-from-oblivion tid-bit and, surprisingly enough, by the man who wrote* THE CARDINAL.

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beaucoup desirable playmate whose preference in fun-mates, for two months, had been Mr. Ginch. As publicity man, and general manager of the Stanhope troupe, Mr. Ginch could do Grelda Bourne a lot of good.

But in spite of that, Hurlburt Hold, with a big time technique and a gardenia in his buttonhole, had slipped the well-known rollers right under the utilitarian Mr. Ginch. Hence the fever, the gnashing of teeth and the suppressed desire for vengeance.

Hell hath no fury like a scorned publicity man.

As troupers, the Stanhope Players were almost quite good. They never played anything farther back than *Camille,* and once, in a torch-bearing crusade, they had produced an English play called *Candida.* At the moment they were rehearsing for their grand autumn premiere, scheduled to open tomorrow evening.

The play was *Officer 999,* billed as "the recent Broadway laugh knockout, a wholesome comedy, replete with rib-tickling humor." Naturally, the rib-tickling lines were all going to Hurlburt Holt, who looked sleekly handsome in the policeman's uniform he was to wear during the first two acts.

In the third act he was revealed as Geoffrey Vanderpoole, scion of millions who was masquerading, for kicks, as a New York patrolman.

He had a wow of a finale with Grelda Bourne, ending in a clinch that lasted while the curtain rose and fell three times. The staid and home-loving citizens of Stratford, New Jersey would gasp approvingly at the sheer romance of it all. But it made Mr. Ginch's temperature leap upward just to watch that final long-run clinch.

The dress rehearsal ended. The disgruntled Ginch stood back stage, pondering on the miserable end of his romance, when he heard Grelda Bourne's voice rippling like a flirtatious brook.

"I'm not playing that finale for half of what it's worth," she was saying to Holt. "Dress rehearsal is over, and I still haven't got that scene right. I just can't get out there tomorrow night, Burty, unless I have another rehearsal of that finale. Will you do it all over again from the beginning with me?"

Ginch's thoughts were bitter. "Oh, so it's *Burty,* is it? A month ago it was *Ginchy.*" He listened for Holt's reply, girding himself for further burning coals.

"Well, it might be a good idea," he said. "We can do it privately. Suppose we rest up until tomorrow, then go over that scene together, late in the afternoon? You pick me up outside the Plaza at five, we'll run through the business, have an early dinner, and be all set for the curtain."

"Sweet!" murmured Grelda. "You give me such confidence. The Plaza it is, then, at five tomorrow."

"I'll poison him!" vowed the suffering Ginch. "I'll pump a shot of cyanide into his coffee tomorrow morning—unless—unless I think of something better in the meantime!"

With pulsing temples he walked to his boarding house, brooding on elegant and efficient methods of homicide. His meditations bore such pleasurable fruit, that suddenly he smiled, whistled aloud, and murmured, "Ginchy, boy, you're *good*."

Arriving at his room, Mr. Ginch sat down at a rickety writing desk and, after several false starts, composed a note. It was a brief missive, addressed to Mrs. Sarah Dinwiddie Philpotts, Chairwoman of the Stratford Civic League and President of the Meggs County Sunday School Association. It was printed, not written. It ran as follows:

*Madam:*

*One who knows the secret of your past life has decided to tell all unless you come across.*

*Put one thousand dollars in new bills in an envelope and hand same to me as I stand at the entrance of the Hotel Plaza tomorrow afternoon at 5* P.M. *I am tall and dark and I'll have a gardenia in my buttonhole. Pass me the money and keep moving. Treachery on your part will mean exposure before the world.*

*Your Dead Past.*

"That'll send the old girl flying down to police headquarters, and when Mr. Hurlburt Holt accepts the envelope she hands him tomorrow afternoon, a squad of detectives will fall on him like a toppling chimney.

"By the time he gets himself squared with the police for attempting to blackmail a respectable citizen, the premiere of *Officer 999* will be a flop. Then it's curtains for one H. Holt. Ginchy, as I've remarked before, you've got a brain!"

The next afternoon at four forty-five P. Thurlsby Ginch posted himself in a drug store across the street from the Plaza and awaited developments. He had waited about ten minutes when the elegant figure of Hurlburt Holt sauntered down the street.

As usual Holt wore a fresh gardenia in his buttonhole. He lighted a long cigarette and posed histrionically in front of the hotel.

"Perfect!" murmured Ginch. "He's working all the time, that boy. He's working himself right out of a job this minute."

Somewhere a clock struck five. As it did so a swiftly moving woman, heavily veiled, brushed

past Hurlburt Holt, thrust an envelope into his hand, and kept going.

Ginch watched gleefully as Holt fingered the envelope gingerly as he glanced with mild curiosity after the retreating figure.

Then, after a moment's hesitation, he tore open the envelope and drew out a flat wad of bills. He counted them once, twice. He stood another moment staring at them, then thrust the money into his pocket. A smile, an ineffably conceited grin, overspread his face.

A moment later Grelda Bourne arrived in a taxi. Calmly tossing away his cigarette, Hurlburt Holt lifted his hat and stepped into the car with her.

He held his hat in his hand, six imaginary cameras clicked, and the car drove off, followed by the hypothetical plaudits of the multitude.

P. Thurlsby Ginch's temperature took an upward lunge. He gasped, staggered into the corner soda fountain, and demanded a lemon and lime, double strength.

And that night the ladies of the Stratford Civil League wondered what made their beloved chairwoman so very jumpy as she presided at a *Clean-Up Stratford* Mass Meeting.

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DEATH IN A NUDIST CAMP (*Concluded from page 156*)

I still didn't get one thing. "Why did you hire Jack Welch to find him?"

"It diverted any suspicion Doris may have that I did it. And . . ." He paused, a slight sneer twisting his lips. ". . . And I never had any faith in private cops. I didn't figure he'd turn up anything of importance."

"But he did, huh?"

"He discovered the Mafia. That's what finished him."

Craven said, "Okay. Take him back and get that statement down in detail. Have him sign it." He looked at me. "Well, Art, looks like the moral is: never underestimate a private eye."

"Thank you, Whit, thank you. I'll be leaving you on that happy note."

"You goin' home?"

"I am, friend, I am. Following which I aim to procure from a very lovely young lady the formula and ritual for acquiring a beautiful all-over tan . . ."

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